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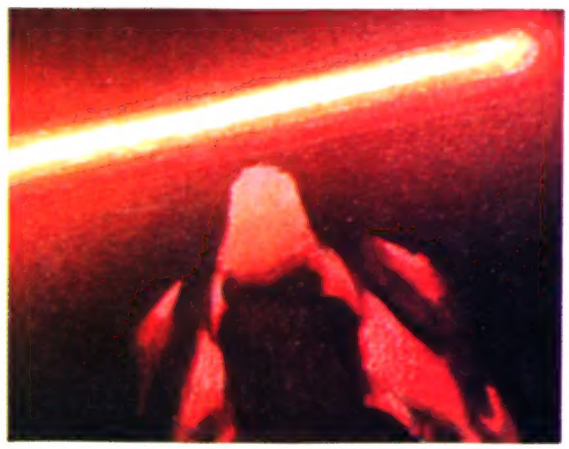

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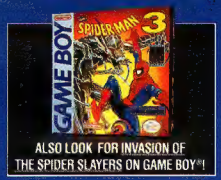

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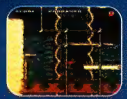

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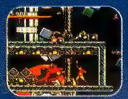

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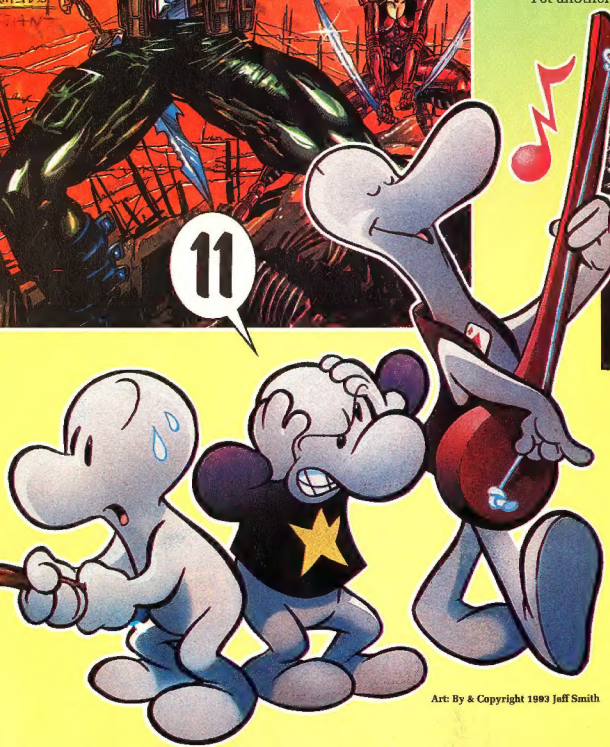

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WORD BALLOONS

Training Wheels

Everyone needs a place to fail. Historically, fanzines and APAs (Amateur Press Alliances) provided the arenas where young fans, on the path to professionalism, could hone their talents. If you were (just barely) good enough, your cartoons, illustrations, articles and short stories would see print—you would get exercise, maybe get feedback and hopefully get better.

In the APAs, a kind of vanity press edged with razor-sharp criticism, you printed your own contributions (and perhaps those of others), sending your few pages of required material to a Central Mailer (who assembled everyone's entries into the massive, often-monthly mailing dispatched to all members). Everyone's work was then exhaustively reviewed by their peers.

Fanzines—unless you edited and published your own—functioned more like real magazines. Writers and artists made submissions which were accepted (with or without changes) or rejected. Editors offered (sometimes valuable) criticism, followed by the LOCs (letters of comment) from readers after publication. But the most important thing was seeing your work in print, knowing people were *reading* what you had created.

Among the professionals who earned their stripes contributing to APAs and fanzines are: Roy Thomas (with a legendary fanzine called *Alter-Ego*), Marv Wolfman, Len Wein, Fred Hembeck, Jim Starlin, Frank Miller, John Byrne, Al Milgrom, Scott Shaw, Paul Chadwick, Bob Layton, Wendy Pini, Mark Gruenwald, John Workman, Paul Kupperberg, Roger Stern, Rich Bruning, Tom Mason, Mitch O'Connell, Paul Levitz (with *The Comics Reader*) and Dean Mullaney. (And those are only the ones we can recall offhand.)

Fanzines aren't as abundant as they once were. And APAs seemingly have diminished as well. As a fanzine graduate (*Endeavor, The Comet, Unreal, The Doc Savage Reader*, among others) who briefly contributed to an APA, I'm sorry to see these areas of fan activity fade. They performed a valuable service.

At least three arenas are filling the vacuum. The feedback/forum aspect has been absorbed by the computer bulletin boards which allow anyone with a PC and a modem to plug into cyberspace for instant electronic feedback from fans on just about any subject. With the increase in the number of independent comics companies and advances in printing technology, today's fans can write and draw their own comics, more or less, and fail on a professional basis.

And finally, of course, there are magazines like this one which have undertaken that classic fanzine mission of exploring the medium through articles, interviews and essays. In fact, COMICS SCENE itself has been a training ground of sorts.

For example, Bob Greenberger, Editor of the original COMICS SCENE (1981-83), is now in DC Comics management, having served his time editing the *Star Trek* comics, *Doom Patrol* and others. Howard Zimmerman, then-Editor-in-Chief, is now with Byron Preiss Visual Publications and assembled the *Ray Bradbury Comics* project for Topps.

Diana Schutz, who profiled Chris Claremont back in the original CS#11 in 1983, edited comics for both Comico and Dark Horse. Cartoonist Brian Pearce became a designer at DC. Randy & Jean-Marc Lofficier teamed with the French artist Jean (Moebius) Giraud to create Starwatcher Graphics.

Peter David interviewed the late Carol Kalish for the original CS #7, impressed her so much that he got a job at Marvel Comics and eventually ended up writing countless comics. More recently, Scott Lobdell wrote for CS. He ended up writing *X-Men* and being interviewed himself in CS #35. Others who've made the transition from writing *about* comics to writing *comics* include Hank Kanalz (at Malibu), Barry Dutter (Marvel) and Franz Henkel (teamed with David Quinn). Will Murray scripted Marvel's *Destroyer* comics, but continues to write for CS.

Past CS Managing Editors Eddie Berganza and Mike McAvennie are now both Assistant Editors at DC. Eddie deals with the *Green Lantern* books while Mike helps out at the *Legion*. And former Contributing Editor Lia Pelosi has joined Marvel, where she's the Assistant Editor on the *Barbie* and Disney titles. (And these are only the folks we can recall offhand.)

All of these people are professionals now, at least in part because they had a place to fail while learning their craft. Without such training grounds, we can all look forward to a far-less professional future.

—David McDonnell/Editor

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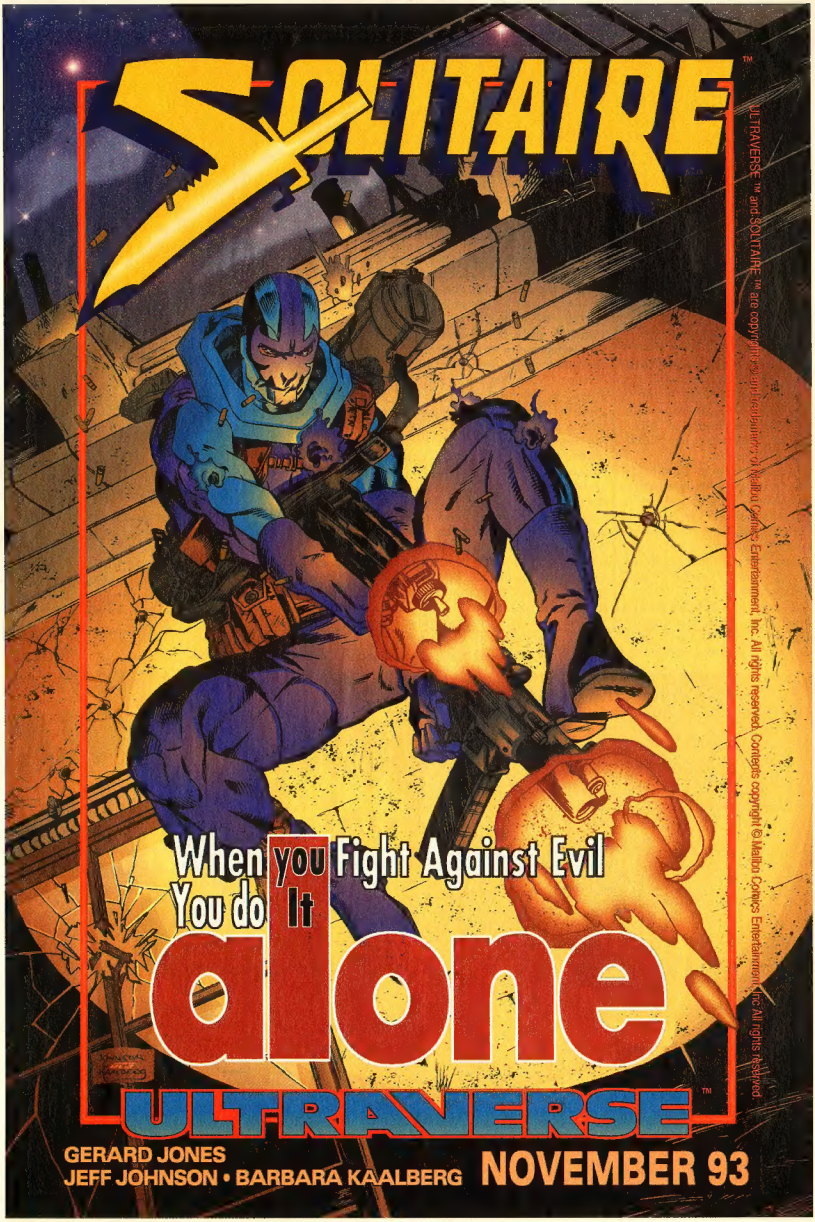
COMICS SCENE RETURNS for an inside look at *Batman: The Animated Movie*. It's in **COMICS SCENE #40 on sale December 23, 1993.**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...I'm about to begin my third year as a CS subscriber, and I'm *really* excited. Each issue is better than the previous one. And I hail the change of SPECTACULAR into regular COMICS SCENE issues.

To another tune, *Doom's IV* is gonna be a movie by Amblin, that's Steven Spielberg. Does it mean that other Image titles could be movie projects, released by the same Spielberg? I hope so. What better combination of energy, talent and youthfulness?

As far as comic book-related projects (as well as comics themselves), I'll be there with your helpful articles and hints. Keep it goin', guys. You do it better each time. Thank you.

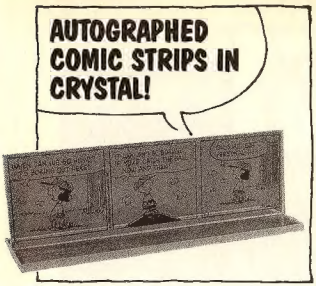
Eugenio Vidal-Diaz
7331 NW 35 Street Box 117
Miami, Fl 33122-1268

...John Hughes and company did an excellent job in bringing *Dennis the Menace* to the silver screen. It was a very enjoyable movie with some hilarious slapstick and a bit of adventure, the latter being the subject of criticism by some movie "critics." They say kids will be scared by the Switchblade Sam plotline. They claim the story is very predictable and by-the-numbers. I saw the film in a theater loaded with kids. They weren't scared. They loved it! I know when I was a kid, I would have loved to see one of my favorite comic-strip characters face an adventure like this one. As for the story, it was very entertaining. I enjoyed it. I think that's more important than having a dull story that "makes you think" or is offensive.

I'm not saying this movie is perfect: It would have been nice to see a couple of "Cowboy Bob" references, or to have Ruff more in on the action, or to have Joey with a lisp rather than Margaret. But the good outweighs the bad: Walter Matthau's Mr. Wilson was excellent, far superior to Joseph Kearns' whiney cry-baby version. Mason Gamble was perfect. (But where was the cowlick?) He was just the right age, as opposed to Jay North, whom I felt was too old for the part. The interplay between Joey and Margaret (who is more—to use Dennis' words—"psychotic" than in the comics) is very funny. A sequel would be nice, too.

Lee Solomon
Sterling Hts., MI

Art: Bob Kimball



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FRATERNITY OF THE BONE

Jeff Smith finds real danger chronicling the adventures of three boys from Boneville.

By HARLEY JEBENS

The book is about growing up, in many ways," says Jeff Smith, creator and publisher of the black-and-white title *Bone*. "In the beginning, the three Bone cousins are ejected from Boneville, the safe, comfortable world in which they had always lived. And they end up in this outside world that's very different from what they expected it to be. That's a lot like what happens when people move away from their parents for the first time."

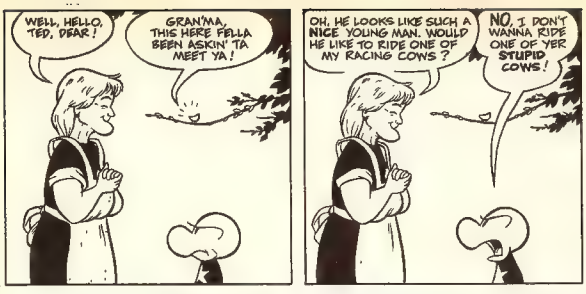
Of course, Smith also describes his book as "Bugs Bunny meets *Lord of the Rings*," so if you expect some solemn treatise on breaking away from the nest and its resulting trauma, look elsewhere.

"I've got a story to tell," Smith says, "and within that story, I get to talk about the things I think about. Things like good and bad, honesty, truth and love. And things like, 'What is there besides what we see? Is there more out there than what our senses tell us?' Within the story's confines, I get to explore all of these things. And, of course, I like to keep those aspects light and have a good time."

What is the secret of *Bone*'s appeal? Maybe it's the central characters: the three Bone cousins, Fone Bone, Phoney Bone and Smiley Bone; Fone Bone's beautiful friend Thorn; Thorn's eccentric Gran'ma; the enigmatic and wise Dragon; the horrifyingly hilarious rat creatures; and the mysterious and vengeful Hooded One. Maybe it's Smith's drawing style, which harks back to the newspaper comic strips and Carl Barks' *Uncle Scrooge* stories that the artist cites as among his influences. Maybe it's the contrast that this light-hearted adventure strip enjoys when compared with the darker tone that comics seem steeped in nowadays.

Following a college newspaper strip and an animation stint, Smith (that's him in the center) has taken his creations into the self-publishing world.

Smith has his own theories. "What I'm trying to do is be true to what I enjoyed reading, especially when I was a kid. When I was younger, I really, really enjoyed *Asterix*, *Uncle Scrooge* and *Pogo*, as well as *Superman* and *Green Lantern/Green Arrow*. And I always wanted Uncle Scrooge and Asterix to go on a *serious* adventure. I mean, Carl Barks' Uncle Scrooge stories are the best, bar none, but they never crossed the line. You always


WELL, HELLO, TED, DEAR!
GRAN'MA, THIS HERE FELLA BEEN ASKIN' TA MEET YA!
OH, HE LOOKS LIKE SUCH A NICE YOUNG MAN. WOULD HE LIKE TO RIDE ONE OF MY RACING COWS?
NO, I DON'T WANNA RIDE ONE OF YER STUPID COWS!
TED, DEAR, I THINK YOU'D BETTER LEAVE. I'M GONNA TEAR THIS LITTLE FELLA APART FROM TH' INSIDE OUT.
YES, M'AM. (SEE YA AROUND, PAL.)

All Art & Characters: Trademark & Copyright 1991, 1992, 1993 Jeff Smith

"Gran'ma Ben may be my favorite character," notes Smith. "She has this super-human strength, which is probably based on Popeye."

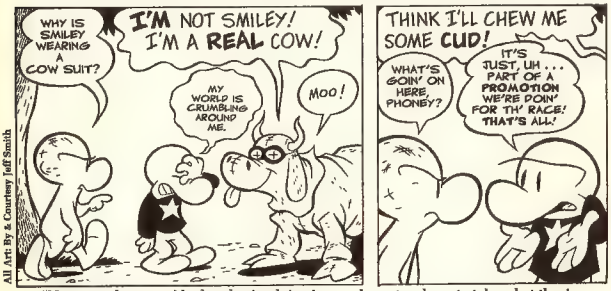
knew Uncle Scrooge was going to come through OK, and he was always going to get his fortune back, but Uncle Scrooge and his nephews were never *really* in danger. It was exciting *how* they were going to get out of it.

"So, I thought, 'Wouldn't it be fun to do those kinds of stories, but throw *real* danger into it. And actually have the possibility of a consequence happening.' You know, having their lives be changed.

"And I also thought, 'Wouldn't it be fun to take all the Uncle Scrooge stories, for example, and read them from the beginning to the end, all in a row. And even though each story was [self-contained] in the comic, what if it also told a chronological story from beginning to end?

"So that's what I'm trying to do. I'm trying to take all the elements I loved as a kid—adventure, serious storytelling and cartoon characters—and put them all together into a larger story. I'm also a *Lord of the Rings* freak, so the idea of a quest and darker characters appeals to me.

"Bone is the title character," Smith says. "That's how everyone except the other Bones refer to Fone Bone. They just call him 'Bone.' It also refers to the people of Boneville. They're Bones. The title has no other extra meaning."


WHY IS SMILEY WEARING A COW SUIT?
I'M NOT SMILEY! I'M A REAL COW!
MY WORLD IS CRUMBLING AROUND ME.
MOO!
THINK I'LL CHEW ME SOME CUD!
WHAT'S GOIN' ON HERE, PHONEY?
IT'S JUST, UH . . . PART OF A PROMOTION WE'RE DOIN' FOR TH' RACE! THAT'S ALL.

All Art: By & Courtesy Jeff Smith

"No matter how stupid what they're doing is, my characters have to take what they're doing seriously," the creator declares.

Thus far in the series, the only Bones who have been introduced are the three cousins—small, white creatures with varying personalities.

"All the Bones, and really all of my characters," Smith explains, "are aspects of me in some way. Fone Bone is like me the way I think I am when presenting myself to other people. He's open, friendly, sincere.

"Phoney Bone is the yang to Fone's yin. He's the Ego, greedy and whiny. He's me the way I probably really am.

"Smiley is the kind of guy who doesn't make the best decisions in the world, but doesn't really care about that. He's the part of me that says, 'Why, *sure*, I'll publish my own comic book.'

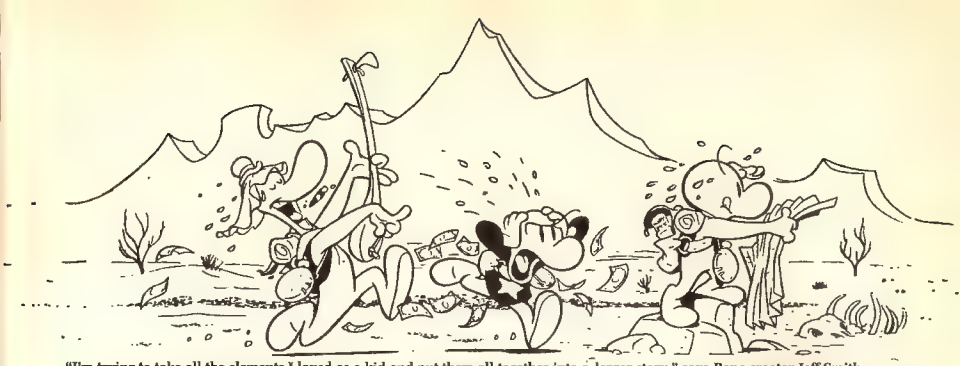
"Thorn is a composite of many of the women I've known, the ideal parts of them at any rate. She's based a great deal on my wife. She's a very good person, and a strong character.

"Gran'ma Ben may be my favorite character. She's a bit rude. She knows a lot about what's going on. She has this super-human strength that she can draw on in times on need, which is probably based on Popeye."

The series begins after the three Bone cousins have been driven out of Boneville, thanks to one of Phoney's many schemes gone awry. The Bone cousins have wandered through a desert, and ended up in a valley, which is where they met the Dragon, Thorn and Gran'ma Ben. This valley is where the action of *Bone* (the series) takes place.

Smith says he has no plans to introduce any other denizens of Boneville into the series, but that "the outline I have for this story is open enough that something like that *could* happen. I know how this story ends and I know what it's about. The big story that involves an ongoing conflict between the rat creatures and (their leader) the Hooded One, the Dragon and Gran'ma Ben—I know what they're battling over and I know how it will end. I know what's going to happen in the final chapters. In fact, the last three books are written already. I have them in a notebook.

"But what happens between where I'm at now, and when I get to those three books—I have about five stops planned on my map. What I do around those five stops—I heard Neil Gaiman describe writing as, 'I'm planning a trip from San Francisco to New York. I know I'm going to stop in Chicago, but I don't know what I'm going to do the rest of the trip in between.' That was probably the most perfect description of writing that I've ever heard. The plot is completely wide open; if new ideas come into play, I can use them, as long as I know I've still got to get to Chicago. So then, once I get to Chicago, I can spread out and meander around.

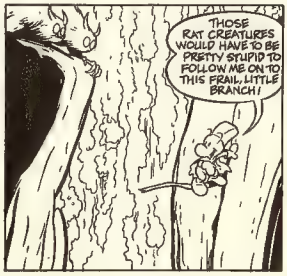


"I'm trying to take all the elements I loved as a kid and put them all together into a larger story," says *Bone* creator Jeff Smith.

As long as my final destination is New York, then I'm OK." The overall story he's writing and drawing could take from five to 10 years to finish.

Of that story, Smith says, "There's definitely a connection between Phoney Bone and the hooded figure. How big that connection is right now is unclear—and that connection could get bigger. The first layer of the connection will be revealed soon. I mean, we already know part of it—the Hooded One wants Phoney Bone's soul. But we don't know *why*. Phoney himself doesn't know how he got into that position."

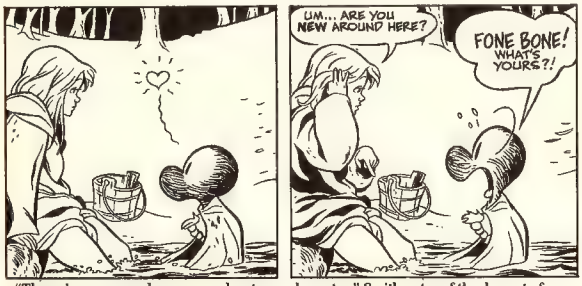
Smith does reveal that "the conflict between Phoney Bone and the Hooded One will lead all the Bone cousins into the major confrontation that concludes this story."



The rat creatures are a major part of the storyline and a problem for the Bones.

The origins of *Bone* lie at Ohio State University, where Smith came up with a comic strip for the college's newspaper, the *Ohio State University Lantern*, with a daily readership of 50,000 people. That strip was called *Thorn*, "just because it was supposed to be about Fone Bone's fixation on this ideal woman," Smith says. He describes *Thorn* as "a *Doonesbury*-type strip, but set in the *Lord of the Rings*, if you can picture that. Not very different than what it is now in the comic, except that the jokes were faster coming. Each day had to be its own set-up."

At Ohio State, Smith, who had always been interested in animation, met animation buffs Jim Kammerud and Martin Fuller. "We started up a company in about 1986," he says. "At the same time, I was talking to a couple of syndicates—King Features and Tribune Media Services—who were interested in *Thorn* or *Bone* as a daily strip. But things didn't really work out. They didn't think they could sell a continuing adventure strip. Although they did like the Bone characters, they didn't like Thorn or the adventure part. Both syndicates thought I should just have it be the Bones in Boneville, and it would be a gag-a-day, Smurf-like thing. And they also wanted to own the property outright. I worked with them a while, but I realized that I didn't want to change my strip to a gag-a-day. I couldn't do it. I just wasn't that kind of a writer. And I didn't want to sell the property. So, I got side-tracked into animation.

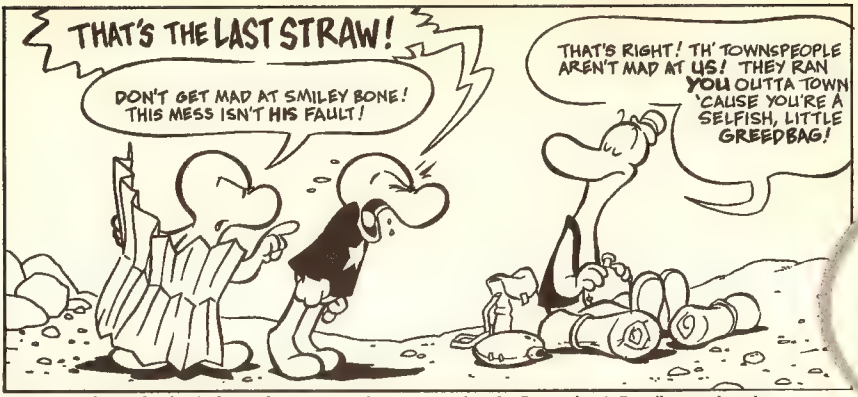


"Thorn is a very good person, and a strong character," Smith notes of the dearest of Fone Bone's heart.

"Once we got started on our animation studio, we really got into it. We were all self-taught. None of us had ever been to a big Hollywood animation studio. But we found some good animators, and we got going." The company did TV commercials, and some work on the feature-length cartoons *Bebe's Kids*, *FernGully* and *Rover Dangerfield*.

But Smith always wanted to get back to those characters from the college newspaper strip.

"In college, I wrote the story as I went. By the time I had done it for about four years, I could look back and see that there really was a good story there, except that I didn't put it there when I was in college. I just kind of


THAT'S THE LAST STRAW!
DON'T GET MAD AT SMILEY BONE! THIS MESS ISN'T HIS FAULT!
THAT'S RIGHT! TH' TOWNSPEOPLE AREN'T MAD AT US! THEY RAN YOU OUTTA TOWN 'CAUSE YOU'RE A SELFISH, LITTLE GREEDBAG!
Design & Layout: Len H. Leake

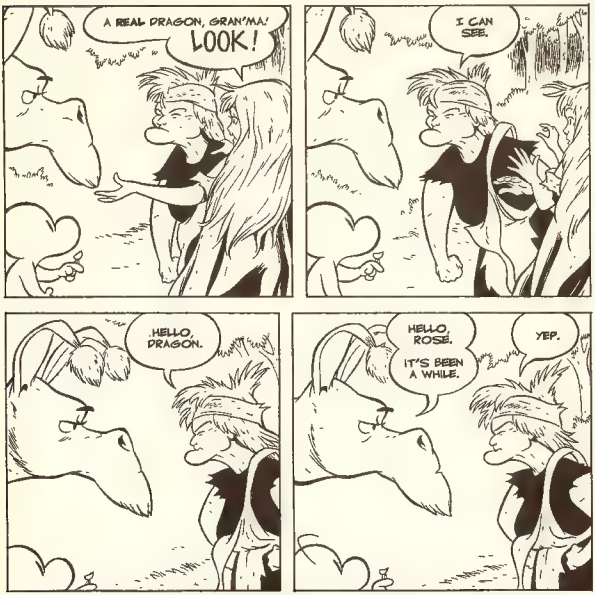
First run out of town, then lost in the woods, Fone Bone, Phoney Bone and Smiley Bone end up in Barrelhaven, where they meet the darndest people.

wrote along. The overall story clicked in my head, and I always wanted to do it again some time, with the benefit of going back through the college material and saying, 'Oh, this joke fell flat,' or 'This was sophomoric,' or 'This joke really worked.' And I could take everything that worked, use it and get rid of everything that didn't."

According to Smith, an encounter with the first issue of *The Tick* (CS #7), in 1988 or 1989, prompted him to begin exploring the comic book market. "I picked it up and read it, and it was a riot. It was this black-and-white book with a color cover, and I had never seen anything like that before in my life. The person who gave it to me had bought it in a comic book store. And I had no idea there were comic book stores. I stopped reading comics in 1972, and there were no comic book stores then.

"So, finding the stores was quite a surprise. I was amazed that the whole system even existed for direct sales. Even more amazing was my discovery of the independent titles. When I saw things like *The Tick* and *Cerebus*, it blew my mind that people were doing smaller books that were actually getting on the shelves. And they were good. Frank Miller's *Dark Knight Returns* had just come out. I read that and I was just astonished at his storytelling, the way he moved the story from panel to panel without using 'meanwhile.' He didn't use little exposition panels, he just moved it along, like it was a movie. When the scene switched, he figured you were smart enough to figure that out.

"These things together suddenly made it seem to me that a comic book was a medium, a place to do a good, creative story...it seemed very possible for me to do the kind of thing I wanted to do."



The relationship between the Dragon and Grand'ma Ben is a mystery. All Smith will say is, "I know what's going to happen."

His experience with the newspaper syndicates had taught Smith that he didn't want to sell his work to anyone, or work through any established comic companies. If he wanted to create *Bone* the comic book, he would also have to publish it himself.

"After I looked at the market," Smith says, "I went to the library and I started doing research, a lot of real, dry, business-type boring stuff that, if anyone interested in self-publishing isn't willing to do, then forget it right now because it's just like being in school: You have to do homework;

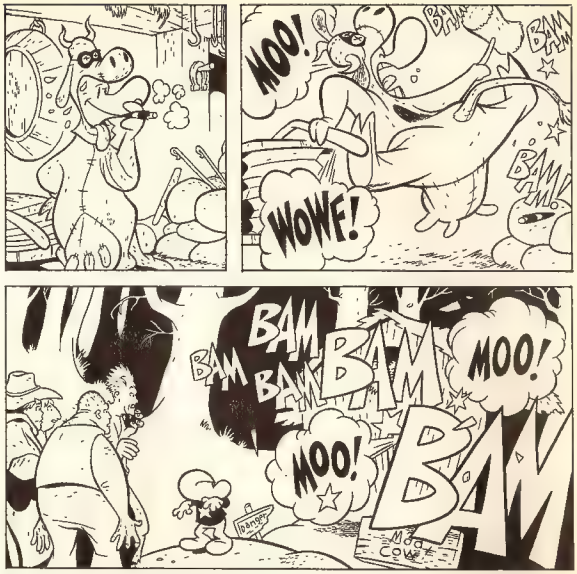
you've got to write business plans for the bank; you've got to do it for real. In the library, you can get so much information. There are books on who buys comics, who publishes them, what kind of materials other artists use, what kind of pens, what kinds of inks. There are books that explain the printing process. A wealth of information, including market figures. What kind of money is in the comic book industry? It's something like a $6 or $7 million-a-year industry right now."

All that research was invaluable, Smith says, but he does admit, "Boy, did I enter the market at the *wrong* time. I was reading microfilmed articles about what a boom was going on in the [black-and-white comic book] industry. Of course, this was in 1990 when I was doing my research. So, all my articles were from early 1989. I was reading about how there were so many black-and-white comics that *anybody* could make a living doing this. Of course, when I entered the market, my information was already a year old. And it was a bad market to enter [thanks to the infamous black-and-white glut spawned by the enormous success of Kevin Eastman and Peter Laird's *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*].

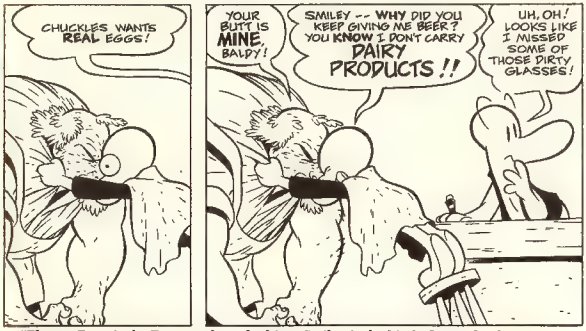
"Still, I didn't meet any resistance from the distributors. They're all extremely professional, and if you send them a professional solicitation, a professional letter with a copy of the comic and you don't sound like an idiot, they'll list your comic. After that, it's up to you," Smith says.

"Now, I didn't get much support. They didn't really push the books or anything. They put it in there, and left it up to me and the book to do the rest. It was a very difficult struggle for the first year. Retailers resisted it just because it's a black-and-white comic, and so many black-and-white books went into comic book stores in the late '80s and just sat there."

For a while, it looked as if *Bone* was going to just sit there, too. Sales of *Bone* were slow at first, Smith says, and bottomed out—*way* out—with issue #4. Still, the enthusiasm of his readers, and the praise he was beginning to draw from other comic professionals, kept him going. Larry Marder, who writes and draws *Tales from the Beanworld* (CS #31), put Smith in touch with Dave Sim, who writes and draws *Cerebus* (CS #1). Sim liked Smith's work so much, he previewed *Bone* in the pages of *Cerebus*. Don and Maggie Thompson of the *Comic Buyer's Guide* gave *Bone* a positive review. Support for Smith's efforts began to pick up, to the point where he now receives 30 to 50 letters a week.



Phoney Bone's get-rich-quick-by-fixing-the-Great-Cow-Race scam ends up keeping him, and the others, in Barrelhaven.

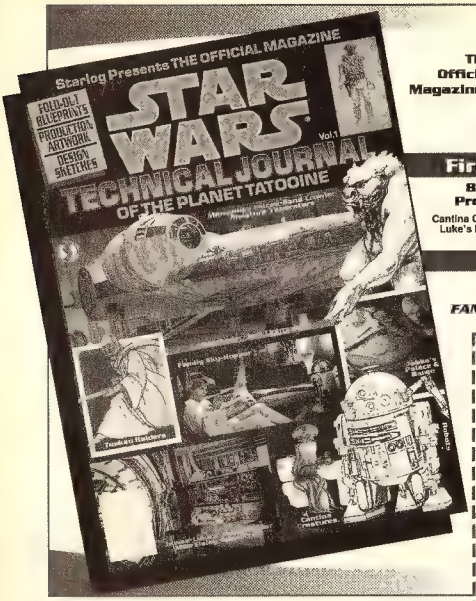

CHUCKLES WANTS REAL EGGS!
YOUR BUTT IS MINE, BALDY!
SMILEY -- WHY DID YOU KEEP GIVING ME BEER? YOU KNOW I DON'T CARRY DAIRY PRODUCTS!!
UH, OH! LOOKS LIKE I MISSED SOME OF THOSE DIRTY GLASSES!

"Phoney Bone is the Ego, greedy and whiny; Smiley is the kind of guy who doesn't make the best decisions, but doesn't really care," Smith explains.

One of the qualities that's striking about *Bone* is the way it mixes the serious and the fanciful in an unpretentious manner. Nowhere is that mixture more evident than in the Great Cow Race that the action in the latest issues of *Bone* has been leading up to.

"I didn't really plan on the Cow Race," Smith admits. "Gran'ma Ben is based on a woman I knew—the grandmother of a girl I was dating in high school. She was gruff, and kind of rude, just like Gran'ma Ben is; and she would actually race cows. She wore Nikes around the house, and she would sort of dotter around. Then, she would look out the window and see that the cows had gotten loose from their fence or something, and she would say, 'There go those cows again. Better round 'em up.' And she would be off, running down the road after the cows. That was the genesis of Gran'ma Ben. Originally, I just dropped this line into the story as sort of a *Far Side*-type gag—'Oh, here's this old woman and she races cows.' And it just sort of grew from that.

(continued on page 64)



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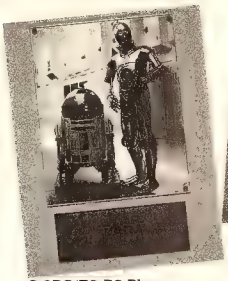

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STRAW FRIGHT

Just in time for Halloween, the Scarecrow gives Batman something to fear.

By WILL MURRAY

Scarecrow is hardly one of Batman's more dangerous villains. So what's he doing challenging Bruce Wayne in the 80-page *Legends of the Dark Knight Halloween Special*?

"It began as a three-issue arc," explains Jeph Loeb, who scripted the storyline with his *Challengers of the Unknown* collaborator, artist Tim Sale. "I really wanted to tell a story in the tradition of those where Batman and Halloween went together. The most striking story that I remembered was the *Batman* issue Denny O'Neil and Neal Adams did when Batman went to Rutland, Vermont for the Halloween parade, and had to solve a murder. That excited both Tim and I, so we began with that idea."

The looming events of *Knightfall* meant that the story would have to be postponed to Halloween 1994 if it was to be done as Loeb and Sale intended. Neither creator liked the idea.

"At that time, Tim had just finished the pencils for the first book," Loeb relates, "and they were so extraordinary, so different from anything that Tim had ever done before, that we suggested doing this as a deluxe edition graphic novel. [Editor] Archie Goodwin came up with the idea that it could be a Halloween special."

Though he is the logical villain for Halloween skullduggery, the Scarecrow is hardly a fan favorite. And Loeb knows it.

"We always felt that the Scarecrow was one of the less formidable Batman villains," Loeb asserts. "Part of the reason was the way he was drawn. Tim took the Scarecrow and did his own version, which is extraordinarily striking and terrifying. We decided to make him a little bit more insane than he was before. He's not necessarily homicidal, but you know by the way he speaks that you're not dealing with someone who has all 52 cards, or in this case, all the straw in his head!"

Loeb is quick to point out that he has not merely "Jokerized" the Scarecrow.

"The Scarecrow is much more interested in the game," he explains. "It's the game of frustrating Batman and of staying one step ahead of him. It's much more cat and mouse. His goal is to get away, not to defeat Batman.

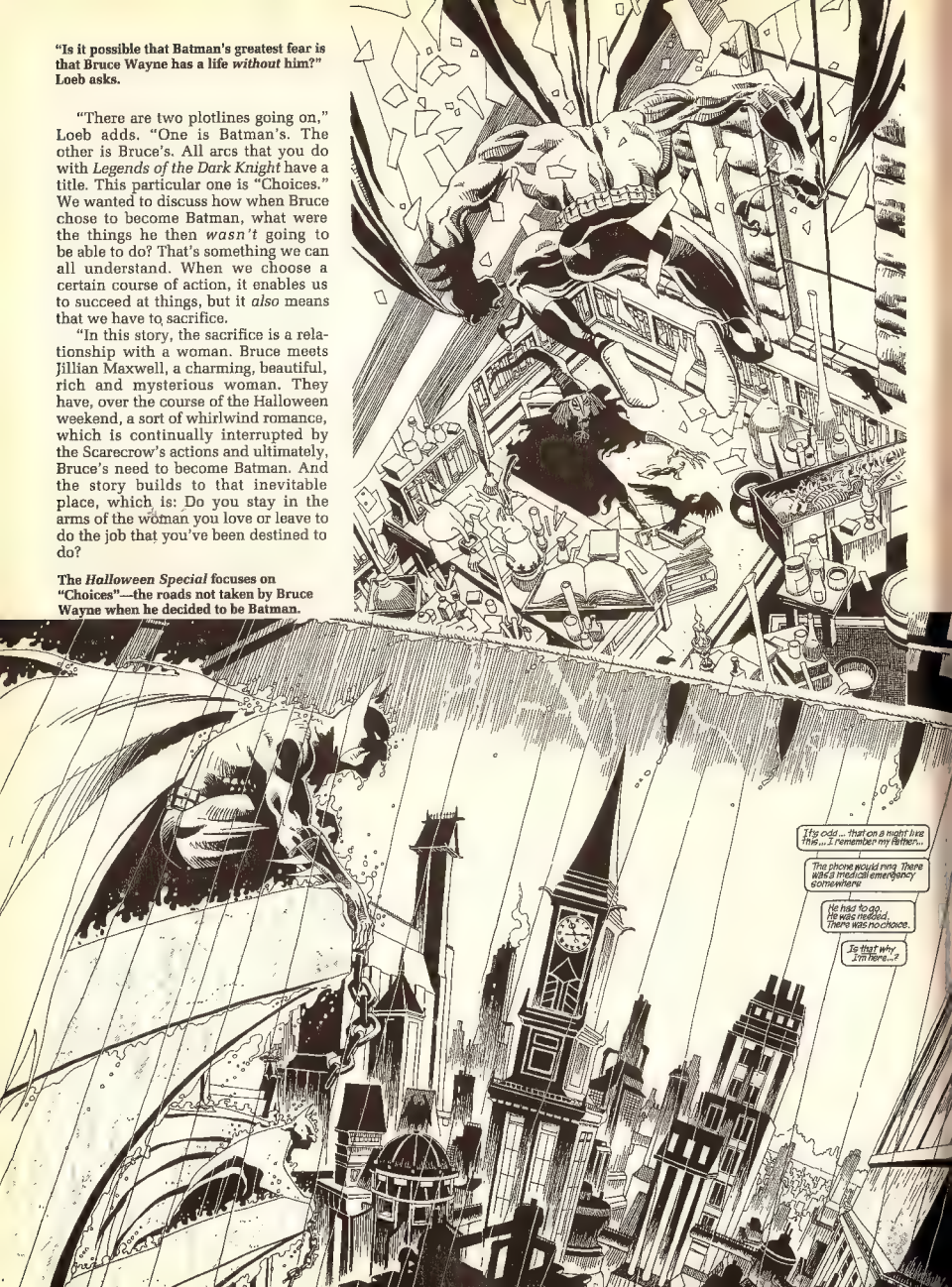
Notes writer Jeph Loeb, "It's an exciting thing to see Tim Sale draw Batman."

"Is it possible that Batman's greatest fear is that Bruce Wayne has a life *without* him?" Loeb asks.

"There are two plotlines going on," Loeb adds. "One is Batman's. The other is Bruce's. All arcs that you do with *Legends of the Dark Knight* have a title. This particular one is "Choices." We wanted to discuss how when Bruce chose to become Batman, what were the things he then *wasn't* going to be able to do? That's something we can all understand. When we choose a certain course of action, it enables us to succeed at things, but it *also* means that we have to sacrifice.

"In this story, the sacrifice is a relationship with a woman. Bruce meets Jillian Maxwell, a charming, beautiful, rich and mysterious woman. They have, over the course of the Halloween weekend, a sort of whirlwind romance, which is continually interrupted by the Scarecrow's actions and ultimately, Bruce's need to become Batman. And the story builds to that inevitable place, which is: Do you stay in the arms of the woman you love or leave to do the job that you've been destined to do?

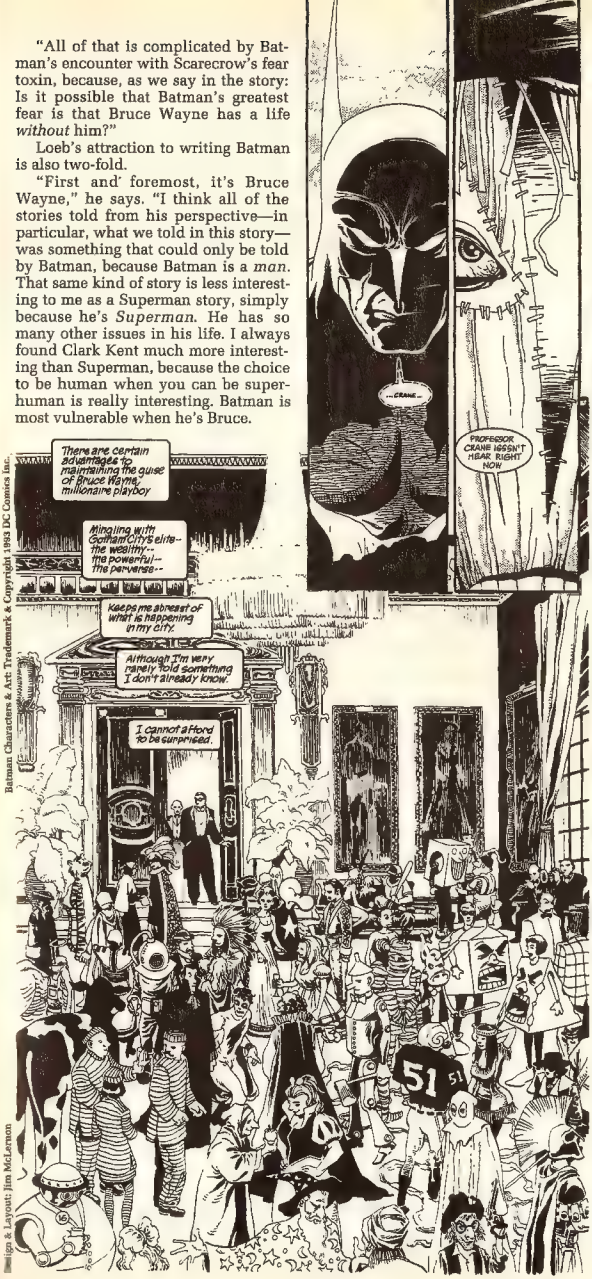
The *Halloween Special* focuses on "Choices"—the roads not taken by Bruce Wayne when he decided to be Batman.


It's odd... that on a night like this... I remember my father...
The phone would ring. There was a medical emergency somewhere.
He had to go. He was needed. There was no choice.
Is that why I'm here...?

"All of that is complicated by Batman's encounter with Scarecrow's fear toxin, because, as we say in the story: Is it possible that Batman's greatest fear is that Bruce Wayne has a life *without* him?"

Loeb's attraction to writing Batman is also two-fold.

"First and foremost, it's Bruce Wayne," he says. "I think all of the stories told from his perspective—in particular, what we told in this story—was something that could only be told by Batman, because Batman is a *man*. That same kind of story is less interesting to me as a Superman story, simply because he's *Superman*. He has so many other issues in his life. I always found Clark Kent much more interesting than Superman, because the choice to be human when you can be superhuman is really interesting. Batman is most vulnerable when he's Bruce.


...CRANE...
PROFESSOR CRANE WASN'T HERE RIGHT NOW
There are certain advantages to maintaining the guise of Bruce Wayne, millionaire playboy
Mingling with Gotham City's elite-- the wealthy-- the powerful-- The perverse--
Keeps me abreast of what is happening in my city.
Although I'm very rarely told something I don't already know.
I cannot afford to be surprised.
51
Batman Characters & Art: Trademark & Copyright 1993 DC Comics Inc.
Design & Layout: Jim McLernon

To Scarecrow, the game's the thing. "His goal is to get away," Loeb says, "not to defeat Batman."

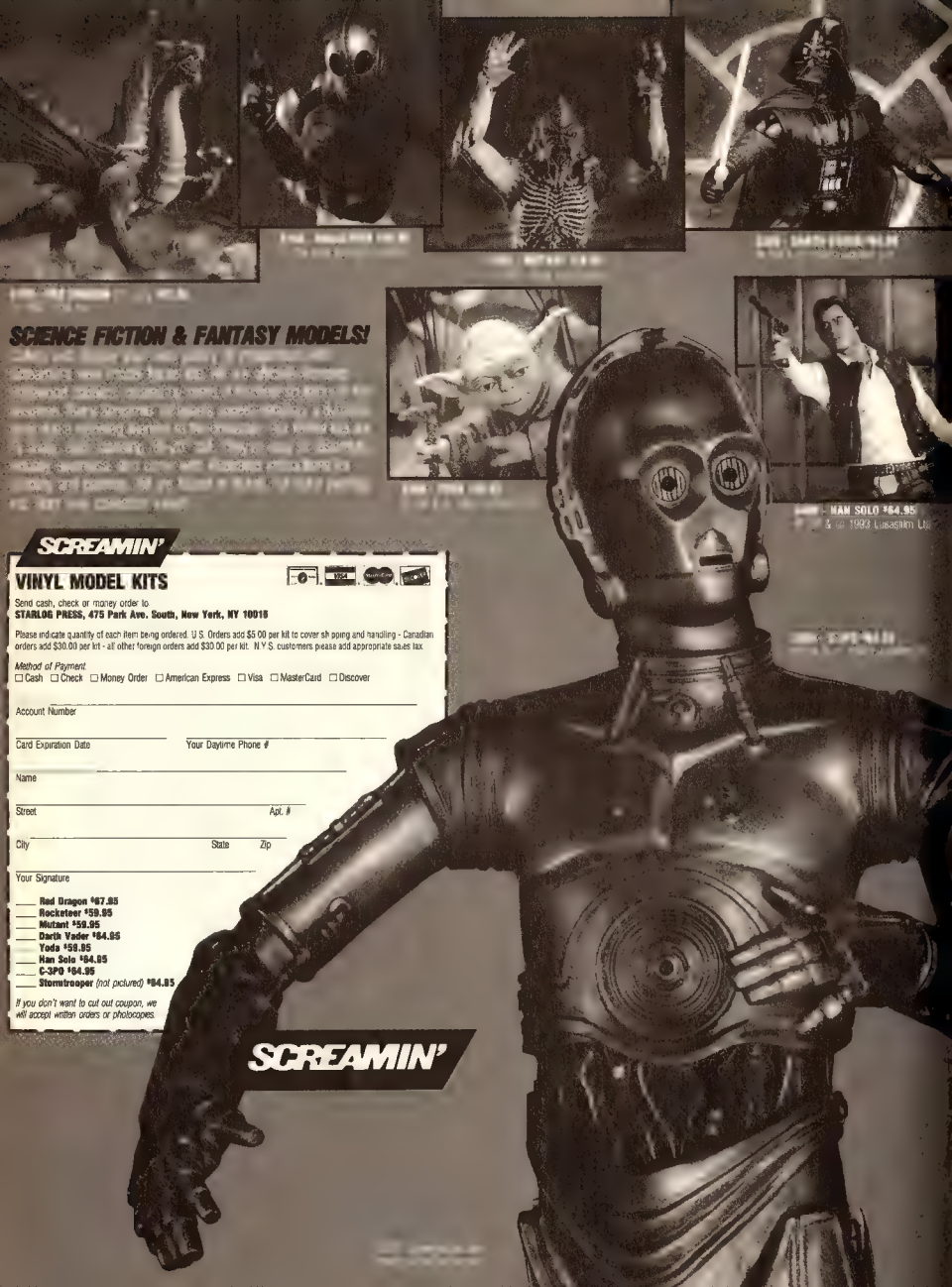
"Secondly, anybody who has seen Tim Sale draw Batman—it's just an exciting thing to see. I don't know that I would be as interested if a different artist was doing this Batman story—or *any* Batman story. There are just certain things that Tim does in terms of shadows, his use of black and the way the cape is almost a living thing, that's much more exciting to me than the way most other people draw Batman."

Loeb's Scarecrow is a bit more insane, a few straws short of a haystack.

Jeph Loeb is so high on "Choices" that he's already planning to tackle another infamous and under-utilized Batman villain.

"Archie paid us the highest compliment that an editor can pay," he concludes, "which is to say, 'I would like to do this again.' And so we are. I'm working on a three-issue story for '94 which will relate Batman's early encounter with the Mad Hatter."

At the Wayne Manor Halloween *soiree*, many of Gotham's elite dress as their favorite comics characters. How many can you spot?



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IN THE SHADOW OF GREATNESS

There's more to this heroic Legacy than mere superpowers.

By DREW BITTNER

Art: Dan Lawlis/Colors: Raul Mounts

After decades spent protecting the world from dangers ordinary and not-so-ordinary, the world's greatest superhero passes on his mantle—and then passes away.

The problem is, his replacement *isn't* up to the task.

That's one of the themes of *Legacy*, the first release by Majestic Entertainment. But don't look to see this title on the comics rack, at least until the trading cards come out. More than just a promotional item, the cards introduce readers to Legacy and his world.

"Issue #0 won't be available for sale anywhere," explains Fred Schiller, *Legacy*'s writer and Majestic's editor-in-chief. "We're only sending it out as a premium. But it lays the groundwork for the whole series."

In *Legacy*, a hero known as the Protector has been working to help mankind since 1924. After nearly seven decades of faithful if unfathomable service, his origins still shrouded in mystery, he announces that he has chosen a replacement: Community college teacher Frank Neuman. And Neuman proves a disappointment.

"There is a convoluted sorting-out process that Protector undertakes," Schiller says. "Frank was chosen to be the Legacy and empowered with all these abilities, but ultimately he wasn't the one the Protector wanted. The critical moment came when a nuclear reactor was melting down and Legacy hesitated, trying to decide what to do—and the resulting meltdown killed thousands. That convinced the Protector that Legacy *wasn't* the right person for the job. The Protector was looking for a clone of himself, and thought he had chosen someone who could handle those powers and responsibilities. He decided he had chosen wrong."

Because the Protector knew he was dying, he had little time left to act once his first plan failed. "When his illness escalated, he left it up to chance, hoping that somehow good would prevail over evil. He put together this Lottery to distribute powers to many people across the world. It's a calculated risk. Lots of bad people would gain powers and others would just be average people on the street who might get corrupted by a sudden dose of superpowers. But it was the best he could do, with his own lifespan growing short."

ONCE UPON A TIME A HERO APPEARED ON EARTH.
THE THINGS HE COULD DO WERE FANTASTIC, AND HE PLEDGED TO BE OUR PROTECTOR...
...AND SO HE WAS NAMED
...BUT OVER THE YEARS WE CAME TO ACCEPT THIS PROTECTOR,
AND LOVE HIM,
AND DEPEND UPON HIM.
IT TOOK US A WHILE. THERE WERE QUITE A FEW SKEPTICS,,,
THEN THE IMPOSSIBLE HAPPENED: THE PROTECTOR DIED.
Art: Dan Lawlis/Stan Woch/Colors: Paul Mounts
All Majestic Art & Characters: Trademark & Copyright 1993 Majestic Entertainment, Inc.

Protector's death was a shock for all, but especially for Legacy, who can't live up to what's expected of him.

The series opens with the Protector already dead. Frank Neuman, the Legacy, is seen taking the Protector's body to an unknown location for burial—an event that has major repercussions in the series' infancy.

"Caroline Reed, a corporate lawyer, is the Protector's closest friend and confidante—some say they were much more than friends," Schiller says. "She doesn't confirm or deny it, but she's furious with Frank that he took the body away without a funeral service. This builds into a huge fight between them."

Legacy and Caroline are both headstrong personalities, but quickly find they must put aside their differences to face a greater threat. The U.S. government tries to strongarm the superpowered Lottery winners into formally declaring their allegiance to the United States.

"The government gradually built a good working relationship with the Protector, but now that he's gone, they're absolutely scared to death at the thought of all these superbeings wandering around uncontrolled," Schiller says. "They don't know how to approach Legacy; they try threats and intimidation first—with very negative results. The government creates something called the DOLS, the Department of Lottery Sanctions, which restricts the constitutional rights of Lottery winners across the country.

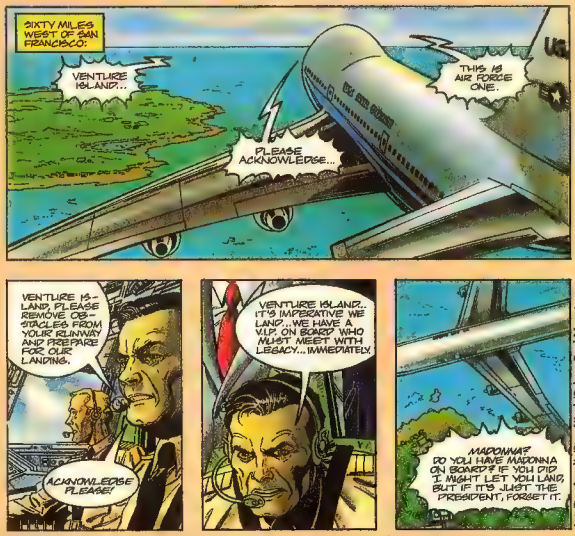
"They scramble to keep an eye on all these people, after trying to rig the Lottery," Schiller says. "The government decides that if you aren't completely for them, you're against them—and if they catch you, they'll sink you in a very deep hole for a *long* time."

The government's motive in this situation is simple: Fear.

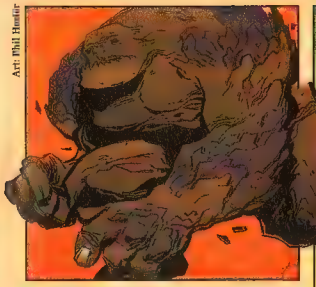
"They're terrified! Any one of these winners is potentially more devastating than an atomic bomb, and if they start running wild, or worse, working for another government, what does that do to our national security? So, the government people go with what they understand, intimidation, not realizing that they've taken exactly the wrong direction with Legacy and his charges. They don't know how to make friends and it costs them later."

Schiller reveals that the government's first tactic is evicting the residents of Protector's home, Venture Island, on the grounds that they're reclaiming U.S. territory (the island is located 60 miles from San Francisco, off the Pacific coast). The Lottery winners have a legal battle to win before their super-powered careers get started. Caroline must use her legal brilliance to forestall the government's efforts, while Frank is forced to shoulder the burden of leading the mismatched Lottery winners.

"Legacy is in an odd position," Schiller says. "He was chosen out of everybody in the world, but things didn't work out. Then, the Protector went and did the Lottery without Legacy knowing, leaving him to train all the winners who come [to the is-


SIXTY MILES WEST OF SAN FRANCISCO:
VENTURE ISLAND?..
PLEASE ACKNOWLEDGE...
THIS IS AIR FORCE ONE.
VENTURE IS-LAND, PLEASE REMOVE OB-STACLES FROM YOUR RUNWAY AND PREPARE FOR OUR LANDING.
ACKNOWLEDGE PLEASE!
VENTURE ISLAND?.. IT'S IMPERATIVE WE LAND.. WE HAVE A V.I.P. ON BOARD WHO MUST MEET WITH LEGACY... IMMEDIATELY.
MADONNA? DO YOU HAVE MADONNA ON BOARD? IF YOU DID I MIGHT LET YOU LAND, BUT IF IT'S JUST THE PRESIDENT, FORGET IT.
Art: Dan Lawlis/Stan Woch/Colors: Paul Mounts

When the Lottery winners flock to Venture Island, the President tries to make an entrance, but gets chased away.



Art: Phil Hester

Tonk, who'll appear in *STAT*, is one of the unfortunates: He got the super strength he wanted, but now he's huge and ugly.

Art: Dan Lawlis/Stan Woch/Colors: Paul Mounts

Design & Layout: Ian H. Laske

Punch-Hurt-Kill-Kill has picked up a bit of a fan following already, and writer Fred Schiller notes, "We might do something [else] with him."

land] for help. And he's thinking, 'Hey, *I'm* the replacement, his 'legacy'...all you did was win a random lottery—that doesn't mean you're my *equal*!' There is a little jealousy, some uneasiness, between Legacy and the Lottery winners.

"Frank is like the oldest son in a family where the father dies with the two of them on bad terms. Legacy has to deal with all the hard emotional issues, the drive to take charge and the fears that he just isn't good enough to handle it. Instead of drawing on the resources around him, he tries to shoulder the whole burden alone and makes things that much worse. He won't be a government lapdog, but the government insists on making life hard for him, amid all his other problems."

The shoes Frank must fill only make all those conditions more unbearable. "Protector is known and loved by everyone on Earth," Schiller remarks. "He should be on Mount Rushmore—he's an icon, a symbol, that everyone looks up to. And here's Frank, plucked out of obscurity and thrown into the spotlight with Protector saying, 'There he is, there's my legacy!' It's a lot of performance pressure! Especially since Frank has been selected for his potential, something he doesn't really believe in. Who could live up to that? Then, with Caroline thrown in, there's a very tense triangle between these three characters—and it doesn't go away just because Protector is dead."

One of the largest rifts between Caroline and Frank is what to do about the Lottery winners now arriving on Venture Island. One thousand people around the world "won" fragments of Protector's power when he went on television one night.

"With the Lottery, you would know immediately if you won or lost," Schiller says. "If you won, a number appeared on your palm, where you held it to the TV or radio when Protector started the Lottery. Once you got the number, you would have to await activation by Protector—who warned every winner about the tremendous risks involved. It's a very volatile and unpredictable process.

"There were 1,000 winners," he adds. "Out of that first planeload [of winners arriving on Venture Island], one woman turned to steam and evaporated, another turned into a freakish butterfly-thing and killed herself; this isn't just fun and games!"

Many of the newly-empowered superbeings make the physical change more easily than the psychological one. Some of the survivors include Dark Bob (who chases Air Force One from the island in the card set), Triphammer, Dumbstruck (her mother died on activation, while she survived) and the powerhouse Iron Will. Those are the main characters readers will meet on Venture Island.

These characters begin without any focus or direction, eventually being drawn into a family unit by the orphan in their midst—Dumbstruck.

"Dumbstruck is going to be a very big future player," Schiller explains. "She's a little girl who's very power-

Art: Jim Higgins

Another title that stems from the Lottery winners is *Flashpoint*, following the adventures of a young boy who can't get the hero thing quite right.

DREAM ON, LITTLE GIRL.
WITH THE PROTECTOR DEAD, THE PRESIDENT WANTS TO MAKE SURE HE CAN COUNT ON LEGACY LIKE HE--
Hey...
HEY... I'M SORRY. SEEMS LIKE I FORGOT THAT THE PURPOSE OF THIS LUNCH WAS TO CHEER YOU UP.
NO, IS OKAY ...I'M ALL RIGHT.
ELIZABETH TAYLOR DELMAR! DON'T LIE!
WHY, 'CAUSE IT'S LAME? LIKE MY CODE NAME, DUMBSTRUCK?
I HATE MY NAME...AND THE WHOLE STUPID LOTTERY... STUPID THING!
PROTECTOR WAS SUPPOSED TO HELP US...SOB ...NOT SUPPOSED TO DIE... OR LET MY MOMMA DIE... SOB...
BETTER STAY WAY FROM ME, SON. WILL...SOB ...YOU'RE GONNA DIE, TOO!
YOU GO AHEAD AND CRY, LITTLE ONE, BUT NO ONE ELSE IS LEAVING YOU. I PROMISE.

Art: Dan Lawlis/Stan Woch/Colors: Paul Mounts

Dumbstruck becomes the center of the family unit on Venture Island; others, like Iron Will, feel it's up to them to care for her.

Art: Dan Lawlis/Stan Woch/Colors: Paul Mounts

Dark Bob chooses to stay on Venture Island to meet the challenge Protector left.

ful—and they have to ask themselves, what's to be done with her? If she's put into foster care, someone could take advantage of her. Her being on Venture Island brings all these characters together as a family. And she makes Legacy realize that he has responsibilities to take seriously. All the people showing up on the island need something to give their lives meaning. It won't be so much 'this guy can break the Moon over his knee,' but rather 'this guy can't cope with his powers—how can we help him?' "

As the magnet for Lottery winners from around the globe, Venture Island becomes the target of another group. A criminal consortium known as The F.I.R.M. tries to seize control of the place after Protector's death. Led by recurring villain Cademous Zark, they're drawn to the place in the hopes that the secret of the Lottery can be found and exploited.

"Zark believes that if he possessed Venture Island, he could make his own superbeings and run the planet. He manages to trick Legacy into leaving the island, then plans to go in and take over. That's basically the story on the cards—introducing these characters and setting up the first clash between them."

The villainous Zark has fought Protector before. "I see Zark as having come to the forefront in response to Protector," Schiller says. "If Protector hadn't appeared as the ultimate good, the criminal element wouldn't have risen to the occasion by creating a Zark, this dangerous mastermind. Without someone to take on the enemies Protector has generated by simply existing, the world would be defenseless. So, we have Zark and his bodyguards, Grill and Bodycount, as ongoing enemies."

Zark doesn't have any Lottery-spawned powers, but that doesn't keep him from trying to control those who do. One of the more intriguing things, according to Schiller, is the eventual revelation that some Lottery winners can pass along the power to others.

"There are a huge number [of winners] who don't activate, but we gradually find that some of the ones that do, have the ability to create more 'winners,' for good or bad," he says. "Also, we explain that the power Protector unleashed wasn't entirely his—he was tapping into something latent in all of us to make this event happen."

The powers granted by the Lottery are a mixed bag, Schiller notes, and many who have powers regret the day they won them.

"Some of the winners get really *minor* abilities, like the power to heat water to lukewarm temperatures or to know when someone is going to ring their doorbell. And for this, they must deal with the same persecution as the world-beating Lottery winners," Schiller notes. "The powers given are definitely a crapshoot, from the cosmic to the trivial. Not only that, but some of the really dramatic powers come with major drawbacks.

"There's a character named Tonk, who appears in our upcoming *STAT* title," Schiller says. "He worked for the Post Office and always wanted to be big and strong. He got all that—but he's also huge, misshapen and ugly, and *mute*! So yeah, I would say he has some regrets."

STAT, or "Superiority Through Ac-

Art: Phil Bester

Big Guns leads the *STAT* team; he's the only member who's a Lottery winner.

quired Talents," written by Schiller with art by Phil Hester and Mike Sellers, is one of Majestic's next efforts, and focuses on a team of high-powered fighting men and women.

"They're not all superbeings," Schiller says. "In fact, only the leader, a guy nicknamed 'Big Guns' for the suit of armor he wears, is a Lottery winner.

"We call it 'acquired talents' because they've spent their lives training and learning how to do all kinds of violent and dangerous things, though they aren't superbeings. I see STAT as being something like cops, in that they can do pretty much anything they like in the line of duty, as long as they don't go over the line. The folks in STAT don't need powers to be tough—they have a very militaristic mindset. 'We're marines, we can do anything!' "

Despite their lack of superpowers, the STAT team will be taking on strong opposition, with villains like In-and-Out and others in development.

Another title, *Flashpoint*, follows the efforts of Lottery winner Victor dos Santos to make a difference in his crime-ridden Staten Island neighborhood. "He's a 16-year-old boy who can generate lots of light and heat," Schiller says. "Unfortunately, he's pretty naive and takes a very simplistic attitude about changing things. The first time he goes out, to fight drug dealers, he gets shot! After a few weeks in the hospital, he re-thinks his strategy—it's going to involve a lot of growing, maturing and finding out how one person can make a difference in a really bad environment. His nemesis is Dr. Night, a drug manufacturer and criminal mastermind of his part of town."

The fourth projected Majestic title is *Heroes Like Us*, wherein a group of Texas Lottery winners have to hide what they are, even as they're pursued by Rapture, a group of evil winners.

"A guy called Pulse pulls a bunch of winners together and sets them out to destroy all the others," Schiller says. "They're nasty and vicious—our guys have their work cut out for them staying ahead of this group. In Texas, winners aren't much liked; people assume they're dangerous, and might decide they would rather kill the winner than live in fear of him. So, Rapture isn't necessarily evil in terms of public opinion.

"Edge, the leader of this [heroic] group, has organic steel running around her body like the seam of a glove. She's a very charismatic person, an ex-mechanic who finds herself thrown into this job with no preparation or training to handle it. We've got a mismatched set of people in this setup, including a college student who was just driving through Texas on his way home, and a 22-year-old mentally disabled man who's probably the most powerful of the winners—except that he forgets things and is easily distracted, so he doesn't use his powers very effectively.

Art: Phil Hester/Dan Schaefer/Colors: Paul Mounts

Cademous Zark believes he can control the world's super-powered beings. Bodycount and Punch-Hurt-Kill-Kill are there to assist.

"The mood of this book is like that of *The Fugitive*, where *all* the characters are Richard Kimble," Schiller says. "They're constantly on the run, and there's no guarantee of safety anywhere. It's a chase."

Schiller admits that additional titles could be added. One such book might star the violent bruiser Punch-Hurt-Kill-Kill, who makes his first appearance in the *Legacy* card set. "Everyone seems to like him best," Schiller muses. "We might do something with him, but thinking of a series is a little premature."

Art: Dan Lawlis

For Majestic's "Comics Futurestars" card set, artists submit their own characters or depict the company's creations.

Each series will be publicized with an advance card set that kicks off the storyline with a not-to-be-published story (like *Legacy*). Schiller says that Majestic's first effort is a card set titled "Comics Futurestars," wherein 100 comics artists were approached to contribute a self-created character. The cards feature artwork, biographies of both character and artist, and a photo (or sketch) of the creator.

"We've had a tremendous reaction to this card set," Schiller says. "People are buying them up because this is the first place many Majestic characters appear—as a sort of 'Majestic rookie set'—but we think the product is so great that that card-buying momentum will keep going. We're hoping that the card collectors see what's going on and decide to get into reading comics." A Futurestars II collection is also in the works.

To many comics watchers, the death of Protector may call to mind another famous demise.

"One comparison people have made is to 'The Death of Superman,'" Schiller admits. "It *isn't* intentional, but when we were putting together the concept for our universe, that was the biggest comic around. Over at DC, [editor] Mike Carlin might have wanted to keep Superman dead, because you can tell some great stories about how much this one man affected the world and now that he's gone, what will people do? But you can't do

(continued on page 58)

ANIMATION SCENE

All Mighty Max Art: Copyright 1993 Film Roman, Inc. & Bluebird (UK) Ltd.

These are the heroes of the new syndicated series, *Mighty Max*.

And these are the villains. Guess who (usually) wins.

Tooning In

Welcome to the Animation Scene! Exciting things are always happening in the industry, and this column is designed to share them with you in the months ahead.

Don Bluth Update: In June, the Irish High Court announced liquidation proceedings for the Sullivan Bluth Studios, which shut down in August 1992. At the time of the layoff, employees at Bluth's studio in Burbank were owed up to four weeks of back pay, plus vacation and sick pay benefits. The court will determine the claims at a hearing on March 1, 1994.

Since the layoffs, most of Bluth's American artists have emigrated to Rich Entertainment (*Swan Lake*), Hanna-Barbera (*The Pagemaster*) and Disney (*Pocahontas* and *The Lion King*). Bluth's former partner, John Pomeroy, is currently involved with *Pocahontas*, supervising the animation on John Smith.

Meanwhile, Bluth (who discussed *Rock-a-Doodle* and his other animation projects in CS #31) obtained enough financial backing from John Boorman's Merlin Films and Hong Kong-based Media Assets to complete production of *A Troll in Central Park* and *Thumbelina* in Dublin. Bluth's last project, *The Pebble and the Penguin*, has been shelved.

Warner Bros. has acquired distribution rights to *Thumbelina* and *Troll*. Though Bluth intended *Thumbelina* for Thanksgiving release, Warner *may* premiere it in spring 1994. This Christmas, Warner will instead release *Batman: The Animated Movie*.

From the Film Roman Files: Film Roman, the producer of *Garfield & Friends* and *Bobby's World*, has entered the action-adventure arena with *Mighty Max*, syndicated on Sunday mornings. Max is a wisecracking 11-year-old (voiced by Rob Paulsen, who voices Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle Raphael). He wears a magical baseball cap that gives him access to invisible portals throughout the globe. His sidekicks include Virgil (*Beauty & the Beast*'s Tony Jay), an ancient talking chicken from Tibet, and Norman (*Night Court*'s Richard Moll), a Terminator-like bodyguard who loves to bang people's heads together. Max and his friends will be outrunning or outwitting various monsters—which you can find at a toy store near you. Tim Curry voices Max's arch-enemy, Skullmaster; Tress MacNeille (*Tiny Toon Adventures*' Babs Bunny) voices Max's New Age mom.

The story editor/voice director is Mark Zaslove (*Cro, Gummi Bears* and *TaleSpin*). Producer Gary Hartle, a director on *Taz-Mania* and *Animaniacs*, is striving to emulate the action of *Jonny Quest* and *Batman: The Animated Series*. The overseas studios are Spectrum in Japan (layouts) and Dong Yang in Korea (animation).

'Tooning On The Sci-Fi Channel: On June 19 and 20, the Sci-Fi Channel introduced viewers to Japanese animation with three movies imported by Streamline Pictures: *Robot Carnival*, *Lensman* and *Vampire Hunter D*. An enthusiastic response prompted the cable channel to provide more animation from Japan: *The New Adventures of Gigantor* and *Robotech*.

The New Adventures of Gigantor is the second animated *Gigantor* series, this one produced in color by Tokyo Movie Shinsha (TMS) in 1980. The 52-episode series has been adapted into English by Fred Ladd, who also dubbed *Astro Boy*. It airs weekdays on SFC's Cartoon Quest at 8 a.m.

For *Robotech*, producer Carl Macek compiled an 85-episode epic from three Japanese series. Harmony Gold syndicated *Robotech* in 1985-1987; it ultimately spawned a movie, a slew of comics from Comico and Eternity, an aborted sequel called *The Sentinels* and a series of novels by "Jack McKinney," but most of all, it introduced a new generation of Americans to the appeal of Japanimated SF.

Streamline is releasing *Robotech* on home video, as well as subtitled editions from the original Japanese series: *Super Dimensional Fortress Macross*, *Super Dimensional Calvary Southern Cross* and *Genesis Climber Mospeada*.

Spider-Man Gets Animated—Again: Veteran comics writer Martin Pasko, a former story editor on *Batman: The Animated Series*, is now the story editor for Marvel's new *Spider-Man* cartoon. There are 65 half-hour episodes in the works. Fox premieres the show with a 13-episode stint on Saturday mornings in fall '94. The rest of the episodes follow in '95.

Now in Bookstores: Tokuma Publishing has released two volumes of *Nausicaä of the Valley of Wind* ($19.95 each) as part of its "Magical Adventure Series." These storybooks are adaptations from the films of renowned director Hayao Miyazaki, with illustrations taken from production cels. Earlier books in the series are *Lapüta: Castle in the Sky*, *My Neighbor Totoro* and *Kiki's Delivery Service*.

New Ren & Stimpy episodes begin airing this month, produced by Nickelodeon's Games studio. Nick has commissioned 13 episodes for the third season, which will air sporadically throughout the year, mingled with repeats.

Why does Stimpy wear a milkman outfit in the Games logo? This was designed in response to a statement that creator John Kricfalusi made in *The Village Voice*, shortly after Nickelodeon fired him from the series. Kricfalusi told reporter Richard Gehr: "You can't just give an unedited cartoon to the milkman and have him finish it for ya. The director's got to finish it. But what they've got over there is a pile of milkmen trying to figure out what my cartoons are about."

Can Games deliver the milk? Stay 'tooned.

—Bob Miller

... And on the seventh day, the Comic Megagods™ went surfing.

Dynamic 11:93

IN THE BEGINNING, THEY WERE STRONG, REBELLIOUS, ARMED WITH PEN IN HAND.

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Jeff Johnson ■ Dan Jurgens ■ Joe Jusko ■ Gil Kane ■ Andy Kubert
Adam Kubert ■ Joe Kubert ■ Ray Lago ■ Joe Lee
Joe Madureira ■ Tom Mandrake ■ Frank Miller ■ Hoang Nguyen
Kevin Nowlan ■ Mark Pacella ■ Jim Palmiotti ■ Dan Panosian
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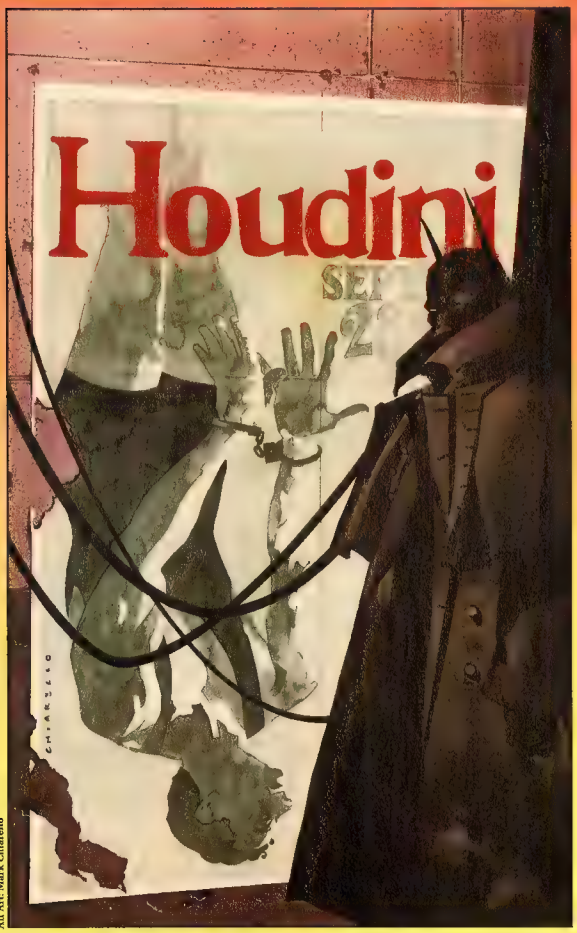
DEVIL time



All Art: Mark Chiarello

In *The Devil's Workshop*, the Dark Knight meets the world's greatest escape artist.

In another time, Batman & Harry Houdini share a great escape.

By DREW BITTNER

Gotham City, 1907. Harry Houdini, the world-renowned escape artist, is visiting, while a fledgling crimefighter known as Batman prowls the city. Meanwhile, in a dismal corner of Gotham called the Devil's Workshop, a white-faced man is abducting children off the streets...and a seance seems to bring back the dead!

Can the world's greatest escape artist and a neophyte vigilante stop the terror?

This is the premise of *Batman/Houdini: The Devil's Workshop*, an *Elseworlds* title co-written by John Francis Moore and Howard Chaykin, and fully painted by Mark Chiarello. "The idea was basically Mark's," says Moore. "He had always been a big Houdini fan. He talked to Howard and me, and we came up with a plot to link these two. That's the hardest thing—figuring out where and when they *could* have met."

Moore admits that he took a few liberties with the historical Houdini, concentrating more on establishing atmosphere and a relationship between the two protagonists. "Houdini has more of a sense of humor than Batman," he notes, "and he's very aware of the theatrical nature of Batman's costume."

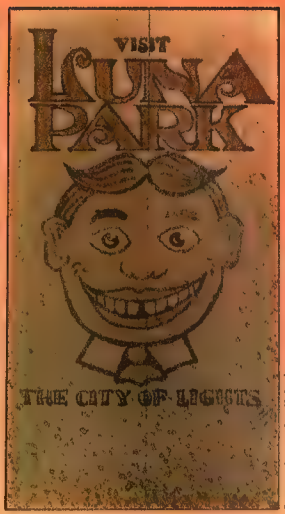
Both elements of Houdini's dual career, escape artist and exposer of fake spiritualists, come into play in *The Devil's Workshop*. "We include a little of each," Moore says. "Houdini's in town to perform, and his appearance is covered by Vicki Vale, a thoroughly modern woman who confuses a rather traditional Bruce Wayne. Houdini ends up getting involved in a seance, in which his and

Bruce Wayne's mothers appear to be summoned, something that ties into his later career of showing up fakes. As for being an escape artist, well, he *does* teach Batman a few tricks."

In this conception of the Dark Knight, Bruce Wayne was one of Teddy Roosevelt's Rough Riders during the Spanish-American War. While in Cuba, Wayne first encounters the bats that will become his motif as a crimefighter.

"A brujo [voodoo magician] and his shamanic techniques introduce Bruce Wayne to what becomes his symbol," Moore reveals. "We've adapted Batman for this period, but we haven't rewritten his origin. He's the same guy, settled into *this* time period."

In the story, a pasty-faced villain "very similar" to one of Batman's contemporary foes is apparently abducting children. His name is John "Mad Jack" Schadenfreude, and he operates in the Devil's Workshop, a brutal and crime-ridden part of Gotham. Eventually, connections are established between Mad Jack and Baron Sergei Montenegro, a displaced European nobleman who has made his fortune as a meat-packing magnate—and has his own dark secrets.



Design & Layout: Lan H Leake

The man who laughs, in this Gotham of the Elseworlds, is "Mad Jack" Schadenfreude.

"There's a great deal going on behind the scenes, that only gets revealed a little at a time," Moore says. "I *will* say that the meat-packing part was inspired by Upton Sinclair's book, *The Jungle* [a ground-breaking exposé of abuses in the meat industry, published in 1906]."

Batman, in this story a young and relatively inexperienced crimefighter, finds assistance from one of the world's greatest magicians and has the adventure of a lifetime—but Moore discourages comparisons with *The Young Indiana Jones Chronicles*. "I wouldn't use that comparison at all," he states. "Howard and I were working more in the vein of E.L. Doctorow's novel *Ragtime*, which mixed fiction and fact [and also includes Houdini in its cast]—that was our model. We blend in some real historical figures; for instance, Tom Mix is one of Bruce Wayne's socialite friends from their days together in the Rough Riders. I think we did a good job of capturing the mood and tensions of the time."

It has also taken some time to capture that mood. "We started writing it in late 1991, and finished the script in early '92. Mark has been painting it over the last year, with a few interruptions. His artwork is absolutely terrific.

"This is one of the best things about *Elseworlds*, being able to take an iconic character like Batman and use him in completely new settings. Plus, Howard and I are huge history fans—and this gives us the opportunity to use that interest. In fact, Howard and Mike Vosburg are working on a 1930s-era Batman *Elseworlds* book that has a very Art Deco/Depression-era look. It should be incredible."

Moore has other projects brewing at DC Comics, including *Under a Yellow Sun, a Novel by Clark Kent*, pencilled by Kerry Gammill and Eduard Barreto. Once scheduled for a fall release, it has been delayed. "I really want to see it," the writer admits. "There's something fantastic about having the finished product in your hands."

In the meantime, Moore, Chaykin and Chiarello have created what John Moore calls a "rip-roaring adventure, and certainly one of the best things I've done." Odds are, with two powerhouse heroes featured in a fully-painted format, *The Devil's Workshop* won't escape success.

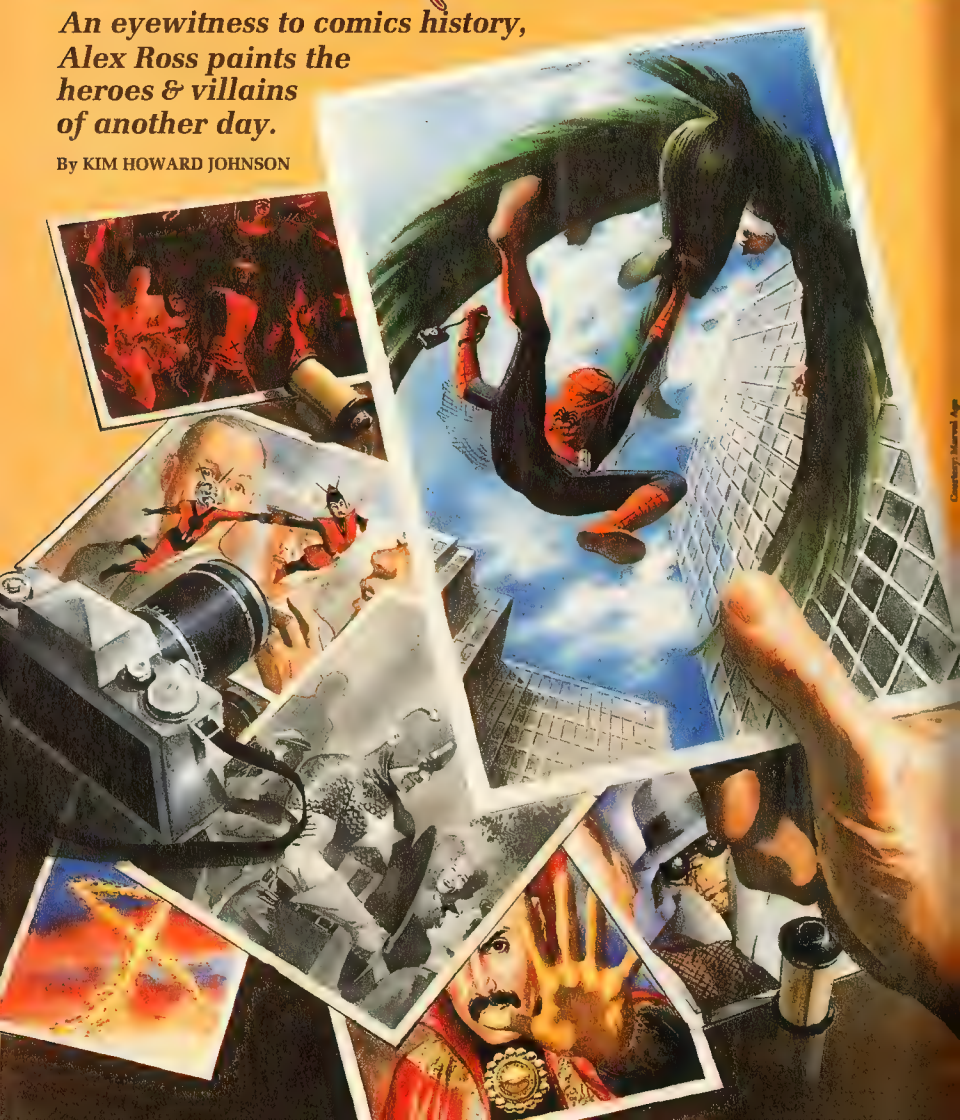
Magic and mayhem mix as John Francis Moore, Howard Chaykin and Mark Chiarello intermingle fact and fantasy.

All Batman Characters & Art: Trademark & Copyright 1993 DC Comics Inc.

A Time of Ma

An eyewitness to comics history, Alex Ross paints the heroes & villains of another day.

By KIM HOWARD JOHNSON



rvels

Readers who think they've seen almost every possible interpretation of the Human Torch and Spider-Man had better prepare themselves. *Marvels*, a brand new four-issue Prestige series, presents the company's early superheroes in a style so lifelike that each panel looks like a photograph. They aren't *really* photos—they just look that way, thanks to artist Alex Ross.

Best known to comics fans for his art on Now's *Terminator: Burning Earth* mini-series, Ross, in tandem with writer Kurt Busiek, has crafted an intriguing chronicle of the Marvel Age. "This book offers a unique perspective, one never fully developed in any other book—what would it really be like to be in this world, with these kinds of characters?" Ross says. "We introduce this concept by focusing on the first

I CANNOT RECALL IT PERFECTLY, BUT IN MY FIRST MOMENT OF CONSCIOUSNESS, SOMETHING UNPREDICTED.
DUE TO SOME FLAW IN MY ORIGINAL CONCEPTION, MY BODY HAD AN INCENDIARY REACTION TO THE CONTACT WITH AIR.

Courtesy: Marvel Age

"Getting that first version of the original Human Torch led me to everything else," Ross notes of *Marvels*' origin. The Torch serial appears in *Marvel Age* #131-133.

heroes of the Marvel Universe, from 1939 to 1973. We end our story around the time of the creation of the second wave of X-Men with Wolverine, just before Punisher and Ghost Rider appeared. *Marvels* is the first installment of a series which will get to those hot, modern characters."

Marvels begins with the first major appearance and origin of the Human Torch in 1939, including a battle with the Sub-Mariner. Captain America and other early superheroes also show up on the scene. Rather than repeating the same stories, however, the four-part series is told from a fresh, human perspective: The point-of-view of a young photo-

All Art: Alex Ross

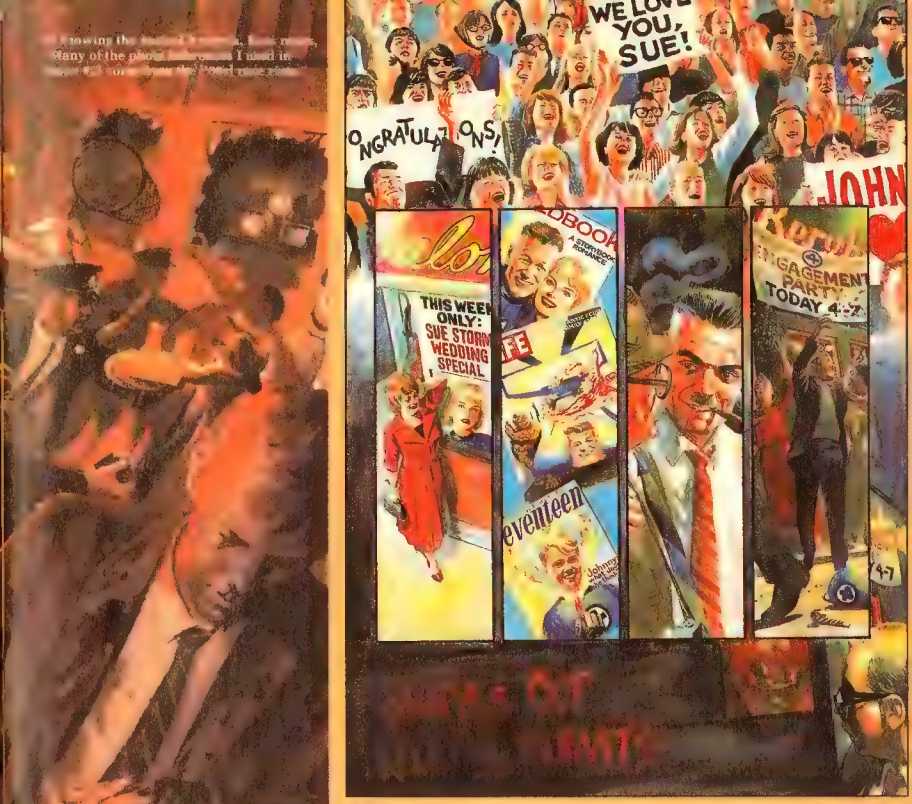
"What would it really be like to be in this world, with these kinds of characters?" asks *Marvels* artist Alex Ross.

"People who were gushing over the Avengers *hate* the X-Men," the artist says.

journalist named Phil Sheldon. "We're using him as the average Joe," Ross explains. The second issue looks at the early days of the Silver Age, and the reaction to mutants. "The first thing we see is the Avengers' battle with the Masters of Evil, and our first indication of the Fantastic Four," Ross says, noting that the Avengers and FF are greeted with adulation.

"Later that day, Phil runs into the original X-Men, and we get a completely different reaction. People who were gushing over the Avengers *hate* the X-Men—they think they're mutants who've come to replace humanity. The X-Men and mutant hysteria provide the subplot for the entire second issue, though they're rarely seen, and that underlines events in Marvel's 1964-65 comics."

Mutant hatred never became a significant part of the X-Men storyline until the *God Loves, Man Kills* graphic



***Marvels*' second issue highlights the grand wedding of Reed Richards and Sue Storm, but the mutant hysteria is a strong underlying theme.**

novel, but there were allusions to it in the early issues. "The X-Men storylines of that time show a certain amount of public knowledge of mutants," Ross reports. "It's never in the *Fantastic Four* or *Avengers*, but since Kurt has read everything that Marvel put out during that time period, he figured that since it was going on in *X-Men*, it was an underlying theme in society. We draw a parallel between mutant hysteria and the race riots of the '60s. Many of the photo references I used in that issue's riots come from race riots."

In addition to the X-plot, issue #2 involves another event. "Everybody is really excited about the upcoming wedding of Reed and Sue—we use that as a metaphor for Beatlemania. I was using photo-references from my Beatles books for cheering crowds," the artist says. "But beneath all of that is the tension of pitting mutants against humans."

Issue #3 centers on the initial arrival of Galactus (from *Fantastic Four* #48-50). "If you lived in New York during that time, you could have seen what looked to be Judgment Day. Most superhero adventures are never seen first-hand, unless you happened to be standing on a street corner. But when the Hulk was fighting the Abomination, the event was covered coast-to-coast. The world was watching, so we focus three-quarters of the book on that one story," says Ross.

Volume three also involves Phil Sheldon's attempts to do a story on Tony Stark's relationship to Iron Man. "At the third issue's end, Phil meets Peter Parker and hates him. Peter Parker gets photos of Spider-Man and sells them to J. Jonah Jameson, who uses them to defame Spider-Man. Phil doesn't know that Parker is just trying to make a living—and that he *is* Spider-Man!"

Spider-Man and the death of Gwen Stacy (as seen in *Amazing Spider-Man* #121-122) are the focus of *Marvels* #4, seen through the reporter's eyes. "Phil gets to know Gwen Stacy, so her death is that much more painful for him to witness first-hand," he says. "Phil sees her fall off the bridge, and watches her spine break when Spider-Man tries to catch her. In the original text, she's supposed to die of shock, but there's a sound effect in the comic that goes 'snap!' when Spider-Man's webbing hits her—John Romita's visuals don't go with what Gerry Conway wrote."

The first series of *Marvels* concludes with that Spider-Man tale, which Ross says is far enough. "We could have taken Phil into the modern age, but this is as far as we needed to go," he declares. "He's there when superheroes first came into existence. He sees different waves come in during the '40s and '60s, and he goes through

"This isn't normal superhero storytelling by any means," Ross says. "It's all seen from the perspective of ordinary people."

disillusionment and loses his sense of wonder. But, there's always a new generation to pick that up."

While Marvel Comics tries to keep their characters and stories timeless, many pivotal events and characters are tied to historical events, such as Reed Richards, Ben Grimm and Nick Fury serving in World War II. Ross says they merely avoided that aspect with *Marvels*. "We have a very '60s feel to the second and third issues, including fashions," says Ross, "but Marvel could always cover themselves and say that the stories took place 10 years ago. The '60s feeling is gonna be strong, but I think readers won't mind."

Marvels also tries to remain faithful, without making any major changes to Marvel history. "We show certain things that weren't actually documented," Ross reveals. "Phil sees Iceman and the Beast running along a street at one point, and it didn't happen exactly the way we have it, but scenes like that happened many times back in the old Jack Kirby comics."

Through a camera's viewfinder, the Marvel Age of Heroes unfolds.

Ross is confident a painted series like *Marvels* can succeed precisely because it has rarely been done. It's not typical comics. "This isn't normal superhero storytelling by any means. The closest we come to a fight scene is a situation with Galactus, but it's all seen from the perspective of ordinary people. We never step inside any superhero's skin and punch somebody, or know Spider-Man's anxieties."

Many TV and film producers have found it difficult to come up with superhero costumes that look as if they could function in the real world. Painting photo-realistic superheroes is also a problem, says Ross, but he likes it. "It can be hard, but it's fun. I enjoy the hell out of it. It can take a little while, but it always inspires me," he says. "I'll think, 'What would this character really dress like? Would this be a fabric costume? Would it be made out of chain mail?' I think like a movie producer or art director to decide what the costume should look like. What are its practical applications? Would Spider-Man wear red and blue? No, he would probably be wearing red and black—a kid wouldn't say, 'Hey, I'm going to call myself Spider-Man,' and wear red and blue longjohns; he's going to think red and *black*."

Some characters were harder to paint realistically than others. "I went for the trickiest character right off the bat," explains Ross. "I had an inspiration to do one of the strangest things you could *ever* see—a man on fire! The Human Torch—nobody has ever seen that as it might really look. Everybody has seen pen-and-ink art of the character, and I've seen a few paintings, but nothing that ever convinced me what it would really look like, and that's what I aimed for originally. What does a man on fire look like? He's not burning, he's emitting flames from his body! It's body heat."

Ross painted many panels from the old, classic comics in his realistic style. "That happens all the time in the series, especially when we enter the Modern Age in issue #2," he says. "The wedding of Reed and Sue is one big splash page, and there's an exact reference page for that [in

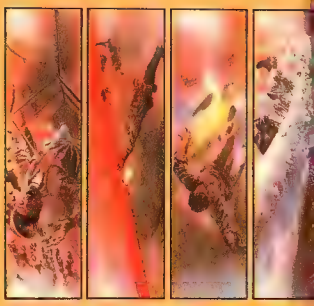
One of the biggest events in Marvel history is the Fantastic Four's wedding; everybody who was anyone attended. Study the guests carefully.

Fantastic Four Annual #3]. There are tons of odd references, which people will be able to track down in old issues or *Marvel Masterworks*. There are never any images taken by me and transformed exactly—they're always taken from a different visual point. Still, it'll be interesting for people to check and see where I started."

He isn't intimidated at the prospect of re-doing the work of seminal Marvel artists like Jack Kirby and Steve Ditko. "In a way, I'm not [re-doing them], because I'm basing my stuff strictly on reality, and realistic figure drawing and poses," Ross declares. "Of course, I'm doing these characters in the era that those artists were working on those books, and there are some scenes and shots that I almost re-created person for person, pose for pose—but, you can't say that I was trying to *imitate* Kirby or Ditko. I'm trying to show you what their characters would have been like in full, brilliant color."

The artistic process begins when Ross receives the scripts from writer Busiek. "I lay out the pages, take photos and get other references together, then make up what I don't have photos for," he explains. "Then, I get to the pencil stage. When I get the pencils approved, I paint it."

Ross can complete 12 or 13 pages per month, so it takes roughly four months to complete each issue of *Marvels*. He's satisfied with the final results so far, mostly because he has been able to make changes and corrections. "I still have a problem with what I'm trying to achieve, as opposed to what I finally get. And, I'm probably more cursed than your average artist, because I'm trying to aim for a *realistic* feel," he says. "With reality, you always have something to compare the art to, as opposed to a pen-and-ink drawing, which is already immediately removed from reality. I've got real colors, lighting and mood that I want to achieve, and I'm always falling short somehow."



Not delving into the angst-ridden superhero lives, *Marvels* looks at things from an everyman perspective.

Ross' use of photo references employs an all-star cast—including Patrick Stewart, Errol Flynn and others—in *Marvels*.

The *Terminator: Burning Earth* 1989 mini-series marked Ross' first comics work, after which he spent some time in advertising. In 1992, he painted a *Miracleman: Apocrypha* story, and the *Hellraiser* tale that introduced the Harrowers. He also painted an unpublished short story for *Open Space*, which is where he first worked with Busiek.

"I was pretty disillusioned with my work on *Terminator: Burning Earth*, because it wasn't the best I could do," Ross confesses. "In a way, I feel like all the work I put into *Marvels* now, I could have done back then in '89—it's just that I had a regular 9-to-5 job, as well as a 22-page painted book to produce every month. Nobody should try that! I was capable of much more than what I did with my first painted project. I wish I had *never* done it now. Because of that disillusionment, I spent time thinking about other pitches I wanted to make.

"When I was doing the wraparound cover for the *Terminator* trade paperback, which is an image of a steel skeleton walking through fire, I was so happy with the fire effect that I wanted to do a painting of the Human Torch in that same pose. People who have the first *Marvels* can check the *Terminator* trade paperback cover, because it's almost the same set-up!"

A realistic Human Torch "was my inspiration for doing the entire series; getting that first vision of the original Human Torch led me to everything else," he admits. "It was the key that unlocked the whole series. Originally,

I thought I would be happy to do a one-issue graphic novel sendup of *Marvel Comics* #1, the same way they're doing the *Strange Tales*, *Tales of Suspense* and *Tales to Astonish* books, and paint a Human Torch and Sub-Mariner story as an ode to the very first story of this corporation—the basis for everything they've done since."

Ross' thoughts soon grew beyond that concept. "I was inspired to do a one-shot or a series called, simply, *Marvel*. I developed the idea for a painted superhero anthology book and did a 12-page tryout story, eight sketches of characters and made a pitch," he says, noting that writer Busiek and editors Marcus McLaurin and Tom DeFalco helped develop the idea (see CSY #2).

"Initially, Kurt thought the work looked great, but I needed a concept. We showed it to Marcus, and we worked out the idea of short stories focusing on those characters I wanted to get to, using a central character that takes you into each story. That's as much of a concept as we had. Tom DeFalco said we should have the reporter witness events previously chronicled in Marvel history, instead of creating new ones. Kurt threw it together and took it in another direction, which was actually always there."

Sentinels attack. The fury over mutants isn't helped by the appearance of these armored giants.

All Marvels Art & Characters: Trademark & Copyright 1993 Marvel Entertainment Group

A graduate of Chicago's American Academy of Art (as was his mother before him), Ross says comics have virtually consumed his life. "I don't have spare time outside of comics!" he laughs. "I do my job, and once a week, I get together with some comics people and we talk about comics! Comics are my profession; it's all I do. This work takes so long to produce, and I have such great ambition to be prolific, that the only way I can achieve that is to spend *all* of my time doing it. I can't paint a page in a couple of hours."

Marvel is publishing three other one-shot, painted books—*Strange Tales*, *Tales to Astonish* and *Tales of Suspense*, all featuring the classic characters most closely associated with those titles. What Ross has seen of the other three artists' work is great. "The stuff looked beautiful," he says. "Again, those are just regular comic stories—there's no real concept behind the *Tales* books, but I'm glad that they exist, because I want to see more regular stories done in paint."

Although he works heavily from photos and his work is widely described as photo-realistic, Ross still brings his own interpretation to his paintings. "If people said my work was stiff because it was photo-realistic, or if they were using the term 'photo-realistic' in place of 'stiff' or 'unimaginative,' then I would be unhappy," he explains. "I am afraid that some people will say I don't have any style to my work, like other guys who do photo-realism. Dave McKean does photo-realistic stuff, but man, his style really makes itself known!"

According to Ross, his style is typified by "big images, symbolic images, realistic figure drawing and fairly normal dramatic lighting. I'm trying to give as much as is necessary for a realistic feeling," he says. "Not so much that the pictures just look like photographs, but you take the images in as much as you would take in any photo. You look at it and say, 'I can see that, I can imagine that as being real,'

(continued on page 56)

"I'm trying to aim for a realistic feel," Ross says. "I'm probably more cursed than your average artist."

CYBERPUNK CLIFFH

The Q-Unit has to keep fighting. Otherwise, they'll blow their minds.

By KIM HOWARD JOHNSON

The world of *Q-Unit* is full of cliffhanger action, swashbuckling space adventure and strange aliens—just like a '40s movie serial. In fact, comparing an issue of the new Harris Comics monthly series to an ongoing chapter in an adventure reel is a tremendous compliment for co-creator Karl Altstaetter.

Q-Unit centers on Alexander Duarte, an Earth scientist from the 1940s who's abducted from his home and taken to a distant galaxy, where he becomes part of a strange team.

"Duarte is captured by a tyrannical government on a planet called Braxis, and forced to serve on a suicide squad made up of different political prisoners from around the galaxy," says Alstaetter. "They all have explosive implants in their heads that will detonate if they don't carry out their missions. Duarte has to deal with this situation and his alien teammates."

Alstaetter both pencils and inks *Q-Unit*, and writes the new monthly series with Robert Napton. "We script and work on every aspect of the writing together," Alstaetter notes, explaining that Napton is a life-long friend who produces Japanimation videos.

ANGER

When the two created the world of *Q-Unit* for Harris Comics, they filled it with a plethora of extraterrestrials to populate the team—there are actually a number of Q-Units around the galaxy serving in different sectors, but Duarte is the only Earthman in his unit.

Duarte's Q-Unit teammates include a wide variety of creatures. "Gaijaxx was part of the royal family of his world, but was captured and forced into slavery," explains Alstaetter. "He was freed by another character, Ruttard, who had become a pirate. Ruttard ended up on the ship that was transporting Gaijaxx. They became partners and had all sorts of adventures together, which led to them coming up against Braxis. They were captured and Braxis put the implants in them, and they became a part of the Q-Unit.

"Etana is a priestess who agreed to join the Q-Unit on the condition that Braxis not conquer her people; she has never had any combat experience and is more of a pacifist. Reza is another member of the team; she's a former slave who was bought by an assassin who trained her to succeed him. She eventually became a master assassin herself and was hired to kill the president of Braxis. She failed, was captured and put on the team."

And those aren't even the strange members of the Q-Unit. "There's a character that is actually two creatures," Alstaetter reveals. "Grox and Wix are brother and sister from a shapeshifting race. Wix is a small girl, and Grox is a big adult creature. In order to escape from a prison camp, they melded into each other and became one entity. The girl is the dominant entity, but when she becomes angry, she shifts into Grox.

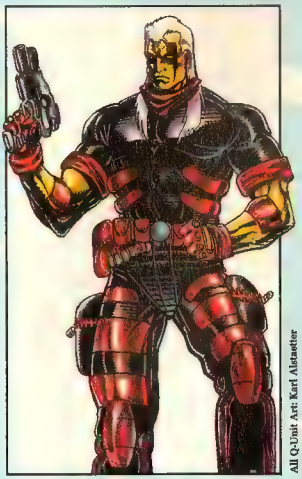
"Maxon is a sorcerer-for-hire; his race sold themselves around the galaxy as great scientists and mystics. He's sort of the used-car salesman of mystics. He's brought into the group as a specialist and stays with the team. The final team member is the Recognizer, one of a line of androids created by Braxis. The Recognizers are highly advanced robots with the ability to detonate the implants in the Q-Units' heads—if these guys are prisoners, then the Recognizers are the wardens."

Alstaetter agrees that the Q-Unit is actually a reluctant strike force. "They get lemons and try to make lemonade," he says. "They all have their own feelings about it, because they're essentially prisoners."

That "prisoner" aspect of the series and the focus on Duarte are the biggest differences between *Q-Unit* and all the other comic-book teams. "While *Q-Unit* is a team book, the main character is Duarte. The others were initially created to bounce off him; he's the main driving force. It's Duarte's story. In most team books, they band together to stop something. In this case, they're brought together, but they *don't* want to be together. They don't like each other. I tried to create characters who were more like real people—not essentially bad, not essentially good, which I think makes it all more interesting."

Q-Unit has been described in several different ways, including "*The Dirty Dozen* in Outer Space" and "*Suicide Squad* Meets *Alien Legion*," but Alstaetter says the series is much more difficult to pin down. "Many people have tried to categorize it in those ways. It's really about a bunch of anti-heroes."

The members of Q-Unit owe their forced allegiance to creator Karl Alstaetter.



The Recognizer: Warden and executioner in one, ferocious, alloy package.

All Q-Unit Art: Karl Alstaetter

Grox...not...like...machines.

General Derge: Robots should not have psychic powers, and he's the reason why.

Alstaetter and Napton have plotted out the first two years of *Q-Unit*. "We don't have exact scene-for-scene details past the first four or five issues, but we have an underlying story for the first two years," he says. "It's well thought-out in that sense. We've spent a lot of time developing the comic's whole universe. We have such a rapport with each other that we can just throw ideas back and forth. It seems to work pretty well."

Q-Unit will usually employ three-issue story arcs to tell its tales, as opposed to single-issue yarns or lengthy epics. "We both felt that extensive arcs don't usually work for us," he says. "Most of our stories can be resolved in three-issue arcs, but every arc is a piece of a bigger story. Each adventure has some significance in the overall scheme of things. As things happen in each of the arcs, the pieces start to fall into place. Certain arcs will be catalysts that push the story farther than others. The first story arc is actually four issues, because we needed to establish the characters and we couldn't get into the meat of the story until the second, third and fourth issues."

That initial story involves civil unrest in Braxis. "They're in the midst of a cold war, as well as internal strife coming from all of the synthetic humans," Alstaetter reports. "The androids have started to revolt, led by a legendary Braxian war robot called General Derge. He's the big villain in the first arc. He finds a chip that can

Duarte: The displaced Earthling who must lead this unmerry band.

Gaijaxx: Walks softly and carries a *big* gun.

Reza: The master assassin who doesn't like being a slave—*again*.

Etana: A priestess who traded herself for her people's safety.

siphon psychic powers, and implants it in himself so he can wield those powers. The Q-Unit is sent in to subdue Derge and retrieve the chip."

In the following story arc, the team is given an unpleasant, unheroic task. "They're sent on an assassination mission," says Alstaetter, noting that the multi-parter contains elements of a whodunit. "They're sent to kill someone, and they know that if they don't do it, they'll be detonated. One of them does the job, but readers won't know who. We'll find out which one does and why—and it may not be exactly who people think it is! There are other elements to it—some of the team members know the person they're sent to assassinate."

Q-Unit also sets itself apart from most comic book teams with its cyberpunk elements, though Alstaetter says it isn't strictly a cyberpunk comic.

"Both Robert and I are big cyberpunk fans," he says, "And we think it's a cool genre. But cyberpunk is hard to do in comics; most of it takes place on the cyber-plane inside a computer network, and that's hard to visualize or explain to someone who's not into computers. We tried to flavor *Q-Unit* with cyberpunk in that the society is deteriorating and crumbling, showing the cost of decadence just like you would see in cyberpunk stuff. On the other side, we wanted to get into the fact that these people have been given implants that download information—if they're in a battle, they download schematics of location and battle plans, a story device commonly used in cyberpunk. Also, having a detonator in there is like having the technology overwhelm you—you've been tagged like an animal, which is something you see a lot in cyberpunk.

"We were trying to do something we could enjoy that had many variables to it. Somebody who reads a standard superhero comic might read it and be introduced to themes that aren't touched on in [comic books like] *The Avengers*."

Maxon: This sorcerer-for-hire can't conjure his way out of Q-Unit.

Alstaetter broke into comics working for Jim Lee's Homage Studios, and he says that that experience remains the biggest in-

Reza no longer walks the assassin's road alone, she's now a part of Q-Unit.

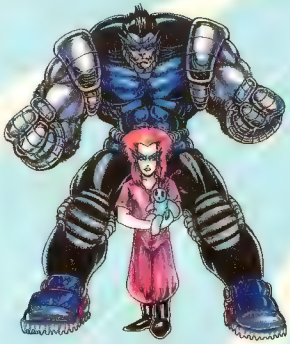
Ruttard: The very model of a modern cyber-pirate.

fluence on his work. "I was assisting Jim Lee and Scott Williams for a couple of years," he explains. "In terms of the story, we have a bunch of different influences, but in terms of artwork, Scott is my biggest influence because I worked with him for so long. Japanese comics really influenced my style, as well, but the story is influenced by science fiction we read, different mystery novels and lots of other stuff. We both read comics when growing up, and they're a huge influence on everything—especially our careers!"

Both Napton and Alstaetter were principally interested in comics as *writers*. "I consider myself a writer who learned to draw," Alstaetter declares. "I wanted to write comic books, and then I realized I was going to have to learn to draw to make my own comics. Robert had always been a writer, and we worked on different fanzines together in high school. He went on to script and produce Japanese animation and I went on to work at Homage, and we've always been in contact. He's like a brother to me!"

Alstaetter plans to stay with *Q-Unit* for at least the first two years. "I see the comic book in stages," he says. "Duarte goes through an arc in his life that has a beginning, middle and end. Then, the next section of his life has a beginning, middle and end. We could go on and ultimately tell where he goes. There could be an unlimited amount of stories, but there is an ending to *Q-Unit*. Some other titles may have an ongoing malaise where they never settle down or change. In *Q-Unit*, these characters evolve. It may not be what everybody wants, but it gives you a better story."

Q-Unit isn't tied into any Harris Comics Universe to restrict continuity, but Alstaetter says they could create their own titles within the *Q-Unit* Universe if they desire. "We've developed the characters to a point where I could take almost any of the supporting characters and spin them off and work on them for a long time.



Grox and Wix: No prison camp could hold these shapeshifting siblings.

"There are other groups within the *Q-Unit* Universe. Duarte was part of this big elite peace-keeping force, called the Terrangers, which is at war with Braxis right now. I could see just doing that book after *Q-Unit*, because I think they're a bunch of neat characters. Right now, though, we're just focusing on getting *Q-Unit* out on a monthly basis with a certain amount of quality. That's the main thing. I think people enjoy being able to get the next installment each month—it really helps you get into the characters and the story."

The regular monthly publication of *Q-Unit* suggests another influence on the comic—the weekly movie serials popular 50 years ago.

"Comics are action soap operas, like the '40s movie serials. Serials like *Spy Smasher* and *Blackhawk* really influenced *Q-Unit*—it's why Duarte came from the '40s! I wanted to make *Q-Unit* like a 'B' science fiction movie. That's really what we're trying to play for. They don't fight just to fight—it's all *motivated* action. I'm trying to do stuff that's a little bit different, but I think if people give it a chance," Karl Alstaetter says, "they'll find that it's different in a good way."

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TRIUMPHANT ENTRANCE

Another new universe opens for heroic business on an individually numbered basis.

By KIM HOWARD JOHNSON

Riot Gear is blasting its way onto the comics scene, and causing a commotion as the latest title in the brand new Triumphant Universe.

Comics fans have seen countless "new universes" debut over the past months, but Triumphant is confident there's room for one more. *Unlike* the Ultraverse, Comics' Greatest World, the Barkerverse, the Milestone Universe, Defiant, Majestic or any of the others, one person, John Riley, is scripting *all* five of the initial titles of the Triumphant Universe.

Riot Gear is one part of a world that includes *The Chromium Man*, *Scavengers*, *Doctor Chaos* and *Prince Vandal*, all controlled by the Realm, which has been in power for hundreds of years. Riley explains that the *Riot Gear* squadron starring in the new series is actually the *second* generation of assault troops created by the Realm.

"When the Realm decided that there was a need for ultra-powerful shock troops, they began genetically engineering a group of beings to be extremely powerful super-soldiers—the Riot Guard," Riley says. "The Chromium Man is an ex-member of the Riot Guard. The problem is, they were made so powerful that the Realm was unable to control them. These people have extremely long life-spans. Chromium is 250 years old! They eventually decided that there was no reason for them to fight on someone else's behalf, and so the Realm went about exterminating them. Those who weren't exterminated disappeared into the underground, like Chromium.

"The Realm needed to replace these shock troops in a controllable way, so they created the Riot Gear, people conditioned to believe in Realm policies. They are augmented with physical training programs and cybernetic implants. They're not just pseudo-cyborgs; the implants are all very carefully concealed and they're all extremely functional. The Riot Gear are the Green Berets of the Realm's military forces. They're sent in as shock troops," he explains, noting that the stars of the current series have broken away from the other Riot Gear squadrons.

"During the course of events in *Riot*

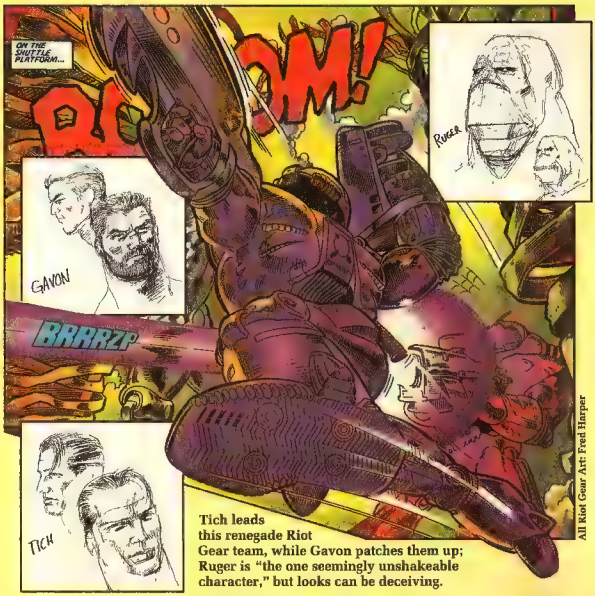
Gear #0 and *Scavengers* #2, the group of the *Riot Gear* series finds a way of breaking the Realm control signal that keeps them in line. The Realm can't allow it to be known that there is a way of breaking this signal, so they give the order to kill their premier squadron. The squadron decides that they would rather not be executed, and they go AWOL.

"*Riot Gear* follows the squadron as they go out looking for their own lives," Riley says. "Up until this point, these people have been conditioned to believe in Realm policies. They've been in the military since childhood, and they don't know much about life on the outside, so they have a lot of learning to do."

The struggle against the Realm dominates the stories of the Triumphant Universe, a fantasy world that boasts a strong interlocking continuity. Triumphant describes their comics universe as "a gigantic tapestry in which each title is but a single thread," a continuity which is being underscored by the 12-part *Triumphant Unleashed* crossover.

Riot Gear is plunged into the center of the conflict begun during *Triumphant Unleashed*. "Right after they break out of the Realm's control, they're caught in the middle of an invasion by a religious army," Riley reveals. "They're torn between a religious army, which they feel compelled to fight, and people who they are normally ordered to control. They discover they're on nobody's side except their own, because the Realm is out to get them. There are a number of organizations—including religious forces—that want a personal Riot Gear squadron. Certain corporations are after them as well. Corporate politics are a little different in this universe, and any corporation would *love* to have their own squadron. The Riot Gear find out that the only people they can really count on is each other."

Although there will be plenty of action in *Riot Gear*, Riley says the series' emphasis will be on characters. "I like to do very character-driven stories," he observes. "The first four issues trace the Riot Gear throughout the *Triumphant Unleashed* crossover. In the first two issues, they escape Realm's control and resolve some internal conflicts. Issues #3 and #4 trace the events in the crossover, where changes in the team will affect every character. One character will die in the middle of the crossover, and it isn't a character that anyone will predict. For the next six issues, they'll be reacting to these changes, exacting their revenge on the person and organization responsible, taking a very active stance. As they decide what they want for their lives, they realize that they have a lot of power, and they can make things happen. It's a few months before they realize that they can do more than just follow orders and survive."



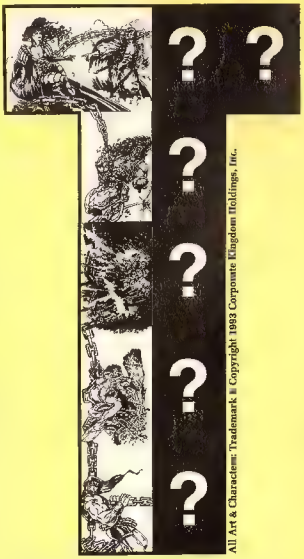
All Riot Gear Art: Fred Harper

Tich leads this renegade Riot Gear team, while Gavon patches them up; Ruger is "the one seemingly unshakeable character," but looks can be deceiving.

Seven characters—Tich, Pope, Nine, Codi, Gavon, Ch'nk and Ruger—make up the core of *Riot Gear*.

"Tich is the leader, a seasoned veteran who has been in the Riot Gear for so long that his interpersonal skills are a bit weak," Riley explains. "Pope, the team's 'Wolverine,' has been in the military for as long as she can remember, and is extremely skilled at hand-to-hand combat and espionage. Nine is a systems expert capable of absorbing, analyzing and storing vast amounts of information, who appears to be the team's weak link. Codi is a highly skilled fighter who wants to lead a normal woman's life. Gavon is a medic, but his personal philosophy is, 'The better I know how to put them together, the better I can take them apart.' Ch'nk is the daring young all-star fly-boy, but he won't put his life on the line unnecessarily; he's the team's star, but he wants to stay alive. Finally, Ruger is a large, very strong humanoid alien, the strong silent type who's the one seemingly unshakeable character, but he's going to get very shaken up as the stories progress."

Members of Riot Gear don't really think of themselves as a team, but as a squad, much as a SWAT team would.



All Art & Characters: Trademark & Copyright 1993 Corporate Kingdom Holdings, Inc.

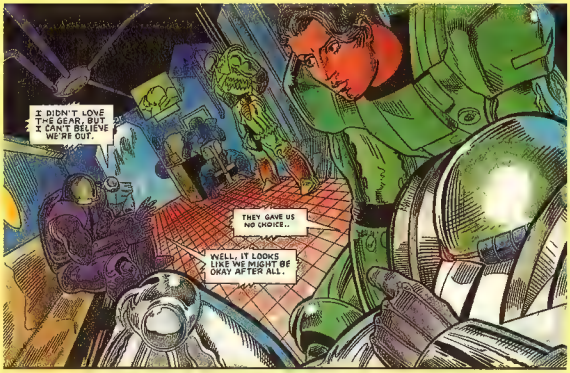
***Triumphant Unleashed* provides readers with interconnecting covers and stories that tell what the characters have in common.**

All Riot Gear Characters, Misc. Art & Characters: Trademark & Copyright 1993 Corporate Kingdom Holdings, Inc.

"Now that they're outside of the military, they're starting to have trouble," Riley says. "They realize they don't have to follow orders, even from their own commander, because they're no longer a military unit. That's causing problems."

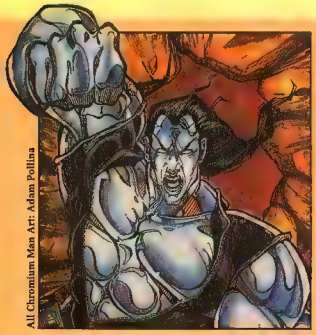
Although the monthly *Riot Gear* is one part of the interlocking Triumphant Universe, Riley says it shouldn't be difficult for new readers to get into the story.

"Even during the *Triumphant Unleashed* crossover, we tried to have all the pieces of the universe support each other, even though you don't have to read everything to know what's happening," he notes. "Each story will be independent, but at the same time, if you read everything, you'll get the overall picture, which we believe is greater than the sum of its parts. If a person reads *Riot Gear* and *Chromium Man*, they'll start to understand the whole situation—the relationship between the Riot Guard and the Riot Gear. If they read the *Triumphant Unleashed* crossover, they'll see some of the political elements, as the various factions start vying for power. They'll start to see how each of the major characters, including Riot Gear, Chromium Man, Scavengers, Prince Vandal—who'll be introduced in his own book in November—and Dr. Chaos are all being manipulated.



"*Riot Gear* follows the squadron as they go out looking for their own lives," says John Riley. "They would rather not be executed, [so] they go AWOL."

"If the readers read everything, they'll get a very large, intricate storyline, where things are actually plotted out to the *day*. We know exactly which day the Riot Gear broke control, how many days they're in transport. We know exactly which day Chromium reaches a landing. All of these events are very tightly laid out. If you want to read everything, you do get the whole picture. But reading one title in and of itself should give you more than



All Chromium Man Art: Adam Pollina

Chromium Days

John Riley explains that Chromium Man, another Triumphant title, features an ex-Riot Guard, genetically bred to be virtually indestructible. While a member of the Riot Guard, Chromium was—literally—dropped from a spaceship onto different planets, left for six months, and told to kill everyone on the planet.

"That's the type of past Chromium is coming from. He just wants to live a normal life. At this point, he has been forced out of hiding, and we follow his attempts to build a normal life for himself," says Riley, noting that the series is actually a very personal tale.

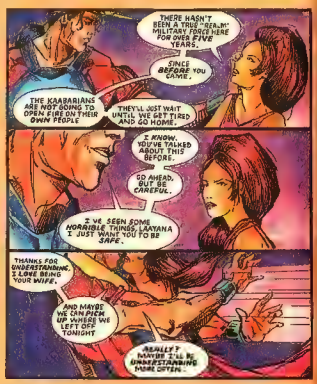
"*Chromium Man* is basically a love story between Chromium, who goes by the name Kaanar, and his wife Laayana," Riley says. "It's really the story of two people who are torn from their homes and realize that they did not know as much about each other as they thought. They begin to grow, separately and together. All Chromium wants is a normal life, and he's not going to be able to have that. The story is really about their relationship as they go through these changes."

There will still be plenty of action in the midst of it all, Riley emphasizes. "People want him, and he has been in hiding for a couple hundred years, but the people who want him have been waiting. Chromium is getting ready to go back to the battlefield. It's the last place that he wants to be, but he has no choice."

Riley is lavish in his praise for artist Adam Pollina, his collaborator on *Chromium Man*. "His art is stylistic in terms of angles and distorted proportions, and I think it works very well with *Chromium Man*," the writer comments. "He's turning out some visually dynamic stuff."

Although crossovers won't be a regular occurrence at Triumphant, Prince Vandal makes his first appearance in *Chromium Man* #2. They'll meet again later. Several key Triumphant characters will be interacting due to an assassination that occurred 250 years ago. "Chromium, Vandal, Captain Ximos of the Scavengers and Dr. Chaos were involved in the death of the Empress of the Realm, and these events are finally going to come to a resolution 250 years later. Each of these characters has a reason for wanting it to end," he says, explaining that one of them is the key player in it all.

"Doctor Chaos actually engineered


THERE HASN'T BEEN A TRUE "REALM" MILITARY FORCE HERE FOR OVER FIVE YEARS.
SINCE BEFORE YOU CAME.
THE KAARARIANS ARE NOT GOING TO OPEN FIRE ON THEIR OWN PEOPLE
THEY'LL JUST WAIT UNTIL WE GET TIRED AND GO HOME.
I KNOW. YOU'VE TALKED ABOUT THIS BEFORE.
GO AHEAD. QUIT BE CAREFUL.
I'VE SEEN SOME HORRIBLE THINGS, LAAYANA I JUST WANT YOU TO BE SAFE.
THANKS FOR UNDERSTANDING. I LOVE BEING YOUR WIFE.
AND MAYBE WE CAN PICK UP WHERE WE LEFT OFF TONIGHT
REALLY? MAYBE I'LL BE UNDERSTANDING MORE OFTEN.

"*Chromium Man* is basically a love story between Chromium and his wife," says writer John Riley.

enough story," Riley explains.

The first six issues of *Riot Gear* consist of three two-issue story arcs, and, according to Riley, each of those arcs flows tightly into the next. The first two issues involve the Riot Gear's escape, followed by the two-part *Triumphant Unleashed* crossover, which sees the squad caught between an invasion force and corporate powers, and issues #5 and #6 see the group enacting vengeance.

"We're going to be telling stories in arcs of two and three issues, at least for the first year," he says. "However, each of these will be part of a larger overall story. The characters will definitely change, though. There's not going to be any story where they remain the same at the end."

Riley has nothing but praise for *Riot Gear* artist Fred (*Marvel Comics Presents*) Harper. "Fred is so amazing that he scares me," says Riley. "He captures the essence of the characters and story. I can tell Fred a character's emotional state and personality traits, and he'll come back with a sketch that's picture-perfect! The interaction has been fantastic. We've been working much more closely since *Riot Gear* #1 at tightening up the storytelling. I'm having a terrific time working with him."

"I like to do very character-driven stories," Riley notes. Ch'nk, Codi and Nine provide an opportunity to do so.

all of the events in this universe up until this point," he says. "He's a very interesting character. Chaos is one of the Lords of Pathos, a dimension one step removed from ours. The Lords of Pathos obtain their energy from the events in our universe. Some of the other characters in Pathos besides Dr. Chaos include Mr. Death, Sex and War. Death derives his own personal power from people who die in the Triumphant reality. Chaos obtains his power from the manipulation and creation of random events, which cause a snowball effect. The Pathonians are in a constant struggle to obtain power from Pathos, but each wants to do it in their own way, and as a result, they're constantly scheming against each other.

"Chaos may be the creator of seemingly random events, but as he says, random events take an incredible amount of planning. He's the planner of the universe. We're going to find out that everything we've read up until the end of the *Triumphant Unleashed* crossover is his handiwork. Chaos' book starts then. He finds out that there's a threat to Pathos itself, which Chaos is going to have to face."

The other two books kicking off the Triumphant Universe have existed as long as *Chromium*, and are also tightly bound to the continuity. "*Scavengers* follows Captain Ximos and his crew. Ximos was around at the time of the assassination—he was once one of their greatest generals, but now he's a renegade. He spends his time trying to rebuild the planets that he destroyed, and encounters problems with the Realm while doing so," says Riley.

"*Prince Vandal* has also been around since the assassination, and has a particular interest in it. Vandal is a freak, possibly the most solitary character in the entire universe. He needs to know what happened during the assassination. His mission for most of the first year is to hunt down people who may have information about the assassination itself. He has questions that must be answered."

—Kim Howard Johnson

A 250-year-old former Riot Guard member, Chromium is trying to make a new life for himself but his past catches up with him.

The past year has been a very competitive one for the comics field. New companies and new comics lines seem to literally spring to life weekly. Riley says Triumphant isn't intimidated by all this expansion as they seek a specific market niche. "Triumphant is aiming for very tight, character-driven stories, with very interesting, exciting artwork that will contribute to the storytelling, and not just exist for its own sake. We're limiting the line to eight different books, so that with the swarm of titles and publishers coming out, if someone picks up the eight Triumphant books, they'll get the entire universe."

Riley notes that he has a more direct pipeline to the comics market than most writers today, which gives him a tremendous advantage in his scripting. "I own a comic book store, Grasshopper's Comics on Long Island. I see so many books come out, and I talk to my customers to see what they're interested in. A book like Mark Texiera's *Union* or *Sabretooth* or Jim Lee's *Deathblow* is beautiful, but to keep the reader's interest, you really need a tight story that will make them *care* about the characters, like Jim Shooter did at Valiant. That's the type of storytelling to which Triumphant is committing itself. We want to have dynamic '90s artwork, but we won't do

(continued on page 64)

Art: Terry Dodson/Al Vey

REINCARNATIONS

While guiding a male warrior reborn as a woman, Mike W. Barr also reshapes the Outsiders for the '90s.

By CRAIG W. CHRISSINGER

Working freelance, many writers expect to hit periods of feast or famine. Mike W. Barr recognizes this boom-or-bust phenomenon, but has been able to maintain a regular flow of work for most of his professional career in comics. Still, 1993 definitely qualifies as a more than prolific year, with numerous projects to keep him very busy.

Chief among his many credits for the year are the new Ultraverse line and the creation of a female superhero, Mantra, scripting the comic version of *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine*, both for Malibu, and bringing back *The Outsiders* for DC Comics.

Barr first became involved with the Ultraverse at 1992's San Diego Comics Convention, simply by accepting a lunch invitation from Malibu editor Chris Ulm. "I had already agreed to do *Deep Space Nine* with them and Chris told me about this new superhero universe they were planning on launching. The layout was very sketchy as little was known at that time, but I expressed my interest. From then on, I guess I was considered one of the founders of the Ultraverse."

In all, eight people, including several comics veterans along with SF writer Larry Niven, were invited to help create the Ultraverse and populate it (see CS #36). The founders soon gathered together in Scottsdale, Arizona for a marathon planning session. "There were about a dozen of us—seven creators, since Larry Niven wasn't there, and five or so people from Malibu. We all just sat down and talked about what kind of superhero universe we would develop, starting from square one. How it would affect the media, day-to-day organizations, governments and things of that nature. Everybody who has created one of the 200 new superhero universes debuting this summer probably asked the exact same questions. We just answered them differently."

The southern California-based writer went to that meeting with the idea that eventually would evolve into *Mantra*. "There were a couple of different slants on it," he remarks, "but I basically went in with the one idea. They seemed to like it very much, and I'm glad I brought her in, because it turns out Mantra is the sole female superhero in the Ultraverse with her own title. Otherwise, it would be a boys club."

That's not to say Mantra is an everyday superheroine. In fact, she's really a male warrior reincarnated in a beautiful woman's body. "Mantra is a study in contrasts," Barr explains. "I wanted to do a story about contrasts and reversals—good and evil, love and hate, magic and science, and male and female. Mantra is the story of a male warrior, Lukasz, who has been reincarnated for the past 1,500 years to serve the cause of the wizard Archimage, who is fighting against the evil wizard Boneyard.

"When one of Lukasz' companions betrays them, Boneyard manages to capture Archimage. Lukasz is killed, but not before Archimage casts him into one last reincarnation—the body of a woman, much to Lukasz' disgust.

So now, Lukasz must learn how to live as a woman and learn the ways of sorcery instead of war."

Adapting to sorcery also requires the warrior inside Mantra to discover the inherent magic inside the woman. "I've done a little bit of study into ritual magic and there does seem to be some sort of preconceived notion that women have more of a mystic aptitude due to the fact they can bear children. It's a life-enhancing idea. I'm not saying that all women are inherently better at sorcery, but I'm playing with it a little bit here."

Mantra's gender reversal gives Barr an opportunity to comment on male and female roles in society, but the writer doesn't want to be too heavyhanded. "I prefer to think of it as humor or satire," he says. "Lukasz, who has been a man for 1,500 years and thoroughly likes it, has to learn how to live life as a woman. He learns first-hand how society, including himself, treats women. He will also learn that there are different kinds of strengths involved in being a woman. Right now his attitude is essentially, 'Man, I'm done for,' because this woman's body has none of the traditional, physical strengths he's used to relying on. Now, he must dig a little deeper for strength."

Mantra also may need to search harder to find the strength to handle being a mother of two children born before his reincarnation. "One of my tag phrases for *Mantra* was, 'Arnold Schwarzenegger becomes a single mother of two.' "

Supporting characters for *Mantra* are Warstrike, a friend, and Notch, one of Boneyard's warriors. The Malibu staff decided to include Warstrike, the creation of writer/editor Dan Danko, in the action. "The office felt there was a need for kind of a prominent male figure in the story, thus Warstrike's entry," he states. "I didn't necessarily agree with the idea that we *had* to have a male action figure, but I didn't mind Warstrike being there. Basically, Warstrike killed Lukasz in his last incarnation and then realizes in the second issue that he has been had. From then on, he's Mantra's ally.

All Mantra Art & Characters: Trademark & Copyright 1993 Malibu Comics Entertainment Design & Layout: Lan H. Leake

It may be Warstrike who finds himself hitting on Mantra, but that's Boneyard who's putting her/him into a peculiar predicament.

"The interesting thing about them is that they're sort of the oddest couple in comics, because Warstrike knows that Mantra used to be a man and now is this beautiful woman. Warstrike is always coming on to Mantra, which frustrates her/him to no end. They have an ongoing friendly rivalry."

Notch is just the reverse in his relationship with Mantra. "Notch is, in a way, Lukasz' opposite. Notch is one of Boneyard's trusted lieutenants, so Lukasz and he have had this ongoing rivalry through the centuries. Notch thinks that Lukasz finally has been killed for good. He doesn't know Lukasz is still alive as Mantra. Whether or not he'll find out will be told in future issues."

Barr has enjoyed his work on the book so far, including his partnership with penciller Terry Dodson. "Terry was my first choice and he's doing a terrific job," Barr says. "I saw Terry's work for the first time in 1992 at San

Art: Terry Dodson/Al Vey

"I wanted to do a story about contrasts and reversals—good and evil, love and hate, magic and science, and male and female," notes Barr.

Art: Paul Pelletier/Robert Campanella All Outsiders Art & Characters: Trademark & Copyright 1993 DC Comics Inc.

Not viewed as heroes any longer, the Outsiders are hunted by the Eradicator and other members of the DC Universe.

Photo: Maureen McTigue

He may be overworked, but Mike Barr accepts it. "I take it as it comes. I do have many more stories to tell."

Diego. When *Mantra* came along, I put Malibu in touch with Terry and here we are."

Looking ahead, Barr mentions a crossover involving all the Ultraverse titles. "The first big crossover is called 'Breakthru,' and it will be in two bookends. One book will come out in November and the other, after the December comics. Only issue #6 of *Mantra* is involved in the crossover, and it will tell a lot of facts about Lukasz' past. The story is called 'One Great Leap for Womankind.' "

Another one-issue crossover occurs in *Mantra* #7, this time with *Prime*. "Both Mantra and Prime live in the Los Angeles area, so Gerry Jones, Len Strazewski and I all thought this was too good a bet to miss. We've already planted some seeds. Readers might notice that Prime's girl friend, Kelly, actually babysits for Mantra."

Writing for Mantra and trying to capture the female perspective on paper is an enjoyable challenge for Barr. "It's certainly a different writing muscle to exercise, and I like that. I like it when I have to stop, think things through and figure out how they work. Even the title, which I like very much because it has that feminine ending and mystic ring to it, but it also has the word 'man' in it. That works on all kinds of levels for me."

Bringing back *The Outsiders* to the DC Universe has been a different kind of challenge for the co-creator of the original group. "As an assignment and not so much as a group, it has been cursed. We're on our fourth penciller now and our fourth editor as well. I don't think it was the Outsiders that drove them away, but I'm not taking any bets. Anyway, *The Outsiders* is finally coming back after six years of trying on my part."

The basic premise for *The Outsiders* is a group of superheroes on the run for crimes they did not commit. "It looks like they've committed a number of murders, which are considered as crimes against humanity by the public," he explains. "They're fugitives, so anybody who's a law-abiding superhero in the DC Universe is obliged to bring them in. It's funny—now there's a new film version of *The Fugitive* and when I sold this new *Outsiders*, I used the old TV show as kind of the template for it."

As the new series begins, the Outsiders are fighting to free Markovia when it's secretly taken over by a cartel of vampires. While battling the living dead, the Outsiders are framed for a heinous murder, labeled as outlaws and forced into a life on the run. "They're mislabeled because they're not outlaws and they are trying to clear their names. They know who framed them. It was a vampire named Roderick, the major villain of the piece. In addition to trying to prove their innocence, they hunt him throughout the series. They just keep getting distracted into one adventure after another, but they always *do* have to keep in mind that they're on the run."

The new version of the Outsiders consists of seven team members, four from the original series and three new superheroes. "The four surviving members, so to speak, are Geo-Force, Halo, Katana and Looker," says Barr. "Geo-Force is a big, strong guy who's essentially my version of Superman. He's handsome, he's a good guy and he hits big things and they fall down. Geo-Force is perceived to be the group's leader, even though he's not and doesn't want to be. Halo is a teenage girl who has glowing auras, each of which gives her a different superpower. Halo is kind of the foster daughter of Katana, a female samurai.

Finally, Looker is a telepath and has psionic powers. At the first issue's end, Looker is killed by the master vampire. We do have long-range plans for her, though.

"Metamorpho, Black Lightning and the Atomic Knight were in the original group. Since they're busy elsewhere in the DC Universe, we wanted to create new characters so we would have control over them."

Thus the introduction of three replacements to round out the group. "Faust is the magician son of Felix Faust, an ongoing character in DC continuity. Technocrat is a very technologically-oriented superhero and Wylde is essentially half-man, half-bear.

"They're interesting in that Faust is directly responsible for Wylde's creation, and Wylde and Technocrat are close friends. In fact, Wylde actually was Technocrat's bodyguard before all this happened. There's interesting chemistry at work there, and the way they relate to the other Outsiders is fun, too."

Art: Terry Dodson/Gary Martin

Mantra's introduction into the Ultraverse prevented the line from being boys only. Well, sort of, considering her past.

Barr says one of the differences between the old group and this new version has more to do with the condition of the DC Universe than any element he has created. "DC didn't want to see just another team of superheroes," the writer notes. "I wouldn't have minded bringing them back together as another team of superheroes, but I realized DC wouldn't buy that. The entire DC Universe, for better or worse, has gotten much darker of late. It's not something I'm particularly fond of, but it's something they continue to maintain, sometimes even in the face of declining sales. But since they keep sort of forcing everything into that mold, I figured, 'OK, what the heck.'

"I was told to play down some of the mannerisms. Some of them were perhaps a bit overblown or stilted. So, for instance, Geo-Force's speech pattern is toned down a little bit. But they're basically the same, just existing in a darker universe."

At present, Barr is happy to be working with the book's fourth artist, Paul Pelletier. "Paul used to draw the *Ex-Mutants* at Malibu, and he's a real joy to work with. He's extremely talented, he meets deadlines *and* he has a phone. All the important things. None of that would mean anything if he wasn't a good artist, but he is."

Returning to the *Fugitive* theme, the writer remarks that the team even has their own huntsman Gerard in the form of the Atomic Knight. Of course, others will hunt them in future issues. "The Atomic Knight used to be in the Outsiders and now he's after them. And we are going to have guest appearances by the Eradicator from *Superman*'s continuity and the new Azrael Batman, as well. I'm not sure about the Bruce Wayne Batman."

Even if Batman doesn't make any appearances in *The Outsiders*, Barr will have plenty of contact with the Dark Knight as the writer of the two-part *Batman: Two-Face Strikes Back* and two graphic novels, *In Darkest Knight* and *Reign of the Demon*.

Starting in January, Barr adds scripting *Wrath*, another title for the Ultraverse line, to his workload. "It's actually the creation of the penciller, David Ammerman, who's currently pencilling *Prototype*. David came up with this idea, and will be doing the plots and pencils. I was asked to do the dialogue."

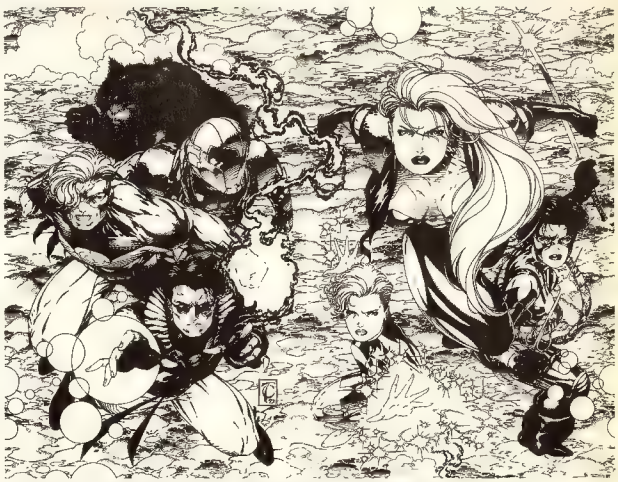
If all of those weren't enough, Barr is also dealing with three mini-series—*Killpower: The Early Years* from Marvel UK, *The Mark in America* from Dark Horse and a four-issue series focusing on *The Shroud* from Marvel.

"The *Killpower* mini-series is pretty much over, but as the title says, it chronicles the early years of this popular Marvel UK character," he says. "Paul Neary, the editor-in-chief of Marvel UK, used to be an inker on *The Outsiders* years ago when I was writing it. Paul and I had kept in touch and he asked me to do some work for him. This was the result."

Second up is a revival of a Dark Horse series. "*The Mark* is basically set early on in an European state in which there's some sort of freedom fighter, the Mark, fighting against this authoritarian government. The rest of the series involves his arrival in America to have adventures and some jolly fun. The artwork is by Brad Rader, who has worked on *Batman: The Animated Series*. He's really good.

"The third one is the Shroud. He's one of, like, 19 Batman-analogs in the Marvel Universe and I think they're trying to differentiate him a little."

Finally, Barr has put his non-superhero detective series, *The Maze Agency* (which he discussed in CS #13), on the back burner for the moment. "I have some offers from publishers, but I don't have any time to do it this year," he says. "I would like to get back to it



Art: Travis Charest

The Outsiders' new line-up includes four familiar faces (Looker, Katana and Halo on the right, and Geo-Force, third down on the left). The new members are Wylde (top left), Technocrat and Felix Faust's son, Faust (bottom left).

Art: Paul Pelletier/Robert Campanella

"They keep getting distracted into one adventure after another," Barr says of the Outsiders. "But they always have to keep in mind that they're on the run."

next year, though. I have a commitment from Adam Hughes for a 48-page graphic novel, which we would probably use to kick off the series again. If it comes back, it'll probably be as a series of quarterly or bi-monthly graphic novels. I think that would be a better format."

He admits that working freelance on comics now isn't as stimulating as when he started writing full-time about 12 years ago, but it's something he would like to continue to do. "After you've done *anything* for 12 years, it's not quite as exciting as when you began," he remarks. "I've been able to prevent burning out, while many writers haven't. That says something."

The secret, he says, to not burning out is to learn how to be a professional and act like one. "Someone remarked to me once that being a professional is basically hitting the ball seven times out of 10. You can do that. I used to work on a story and think that it had to be the absolute best story I had ever done. After you learn your craft, you begin to realize that if you tell yourself that every story has to be the best you've ever done, then you're going to drive yourself into a frenzy. Not every story is the best you've ever written and you can't keep topping yourself.

"Ten years ago, if you had told me I would write x thousands of pages of comics, it would have been so overwhelming that I probably wouldn't have been able to do it. You don't think about that because that's the way people burn out. You basically have to take it like life—one day at a time. You think, 'OK, I wrote six pages today and I can write six pages tomorrow. Next week will take care of itself.' "

For Mike W. Barr, 1993 is a very busy year, and he still has plenty more stories to tell. "Am I overworked? Well, yeah, but I take it as it comes. It's not going to last forever. I do have many more stories to tell. I have no idea right now what a lot of them will be, but I'm always looking for ideas. Things just sort of pop into your head when you least expect it."

The Two Faces of Two-Face

While the Dark Knight is facing new foes in the monthly *Batman* titles, Mike W. Barr is pitting him against an old enemy in the two-issue mini-series, *Batman: Two-Face Strikes Twice*, starting in November.

Each issue features two stories written by Barr with artwork by two different artists, but they revolve around a common theme. "They're both essentially part of one long story," Barr remarks. "The new story is a sequel to the old—we're doing two 48-page stories, and splitting them into four 24-page chunks. Readers who get the first issue will find Batman in the same Two-Face death trap at the end of each story, but he has to escape each one in a different way.

All Two-Face Art: Dick Sprang

Covers for the Golden Age *Two-Face* story are provided by Dick Sprang, "who, for my money, is probably the best Batman artist," says Mike Barr.

"The old Golden Age story, involving the Dick Grayson Robin, was drawn by Joe Staton in a style reminiscent of Dick Sprang, who, for my money, is probably the best Batman artist. The modern story has the current Robin, Tim Drake, and art by Daerick Gross."

What makes Two-Face so appealing to Barr is how his two-sided nature must be reflected in the theme of any yarn featuring the duality-obsessed adversary. "The Joker is many people's favorite villain, and I like him a great deal, but for something to be a Joker crime, all he has to do is kill someone and laugh. For it to be a true Two-Face story, there must be some unique take on the theme of duality.

"It's almost like writing a detective story, which in many ways these are. They are battles of wits between Batman and Two-Face. I'm a fan of detective stories, so it's always a challenge to come up with new ways to do it."

Barr says his approach to Two-Face is based on the classic stories by Bill Finger and the editorial touch of Denny O'Neil. "He's a man obsessed with the duality of things. Virtually everything about his criminal nature is dictated by his two-headed coin."

Mike W. Barr, a veteran of numerous Dark Knight projects, still enjoys the character. "Batman is what I call an effort hero," he says. "His life could have been totally stagnated by the loss of his parents at an early age, but he *chose* to make something of himself, no matter what. Even though that obsession dominates his life to some degree, in that he became a crime-fighter, he could have become like Two-Face—someone on society's fringes who rages against the system. Instead, he turned this obsession to the administration of justice. That's what I find interesting about him."

—Craig W. Chrissinger

"For it to be a true Two-Face story, there must be some unique take on the theme of duality," Barr explains.

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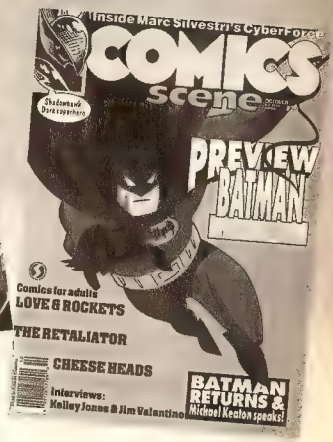

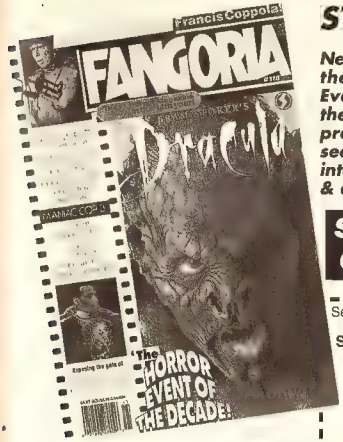

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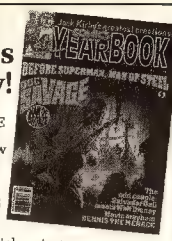

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Marvels

(continued from page 39)

as opposed to typical comic art, where you're inured to it. The comic book world of superheroes is separate from the real world; I'm trying to link them."

Ross is quick to emphasize that he doesn't use photos the way other artists use Art-o-Graphs. "I would like everyone to know that nothing is being traced," he announces. "Everything is being drawn by my eyes looking at something, or picking up something in my mind. When I was in art school, this [photo-realism] was what everybody was trying to do, and there were very few people who got to that level. Just copying something that you can look at is tough—you think portraiture is easy? If it's so damned easy, why doesn't everyone else do it? Tracing an image is *very* easy."

Several of Ross' friends—including other comics pros—served as his models for photographs to assist him in painting the characters. Artist Mark (*The Real Ghostbusters*) Braun played reporter Phil Sheldon, and publisher Laurie (Bradach Fine Art) Bradach posed as his fiancee/wife Doris (Ross' father is the model for the clergyman who marries the pair). Actor/comics writer Del (*Wasteland*) Close cameos as an editor, and artist Hilary (*Plastic Man*) Barta is a Bible-thumping minister preaching about the world's end in the third issue, foretelling Galactus. Inker Andrew Pepoy plays the young J. Jonah Jameson. "He's never referred to by name, but it's very obvious who he is," Ross says. "The *Spider-Man* editor decided at the last minute, after the artwork was done for the entire issue, that we couldn't let it be Jameson, because Jameson would have been younger than that in WW II. He was really being stingy about it, so we just took Jameson's name out of any reference to the character."

Ross had a great deal of fun with some little touches to reward careful readers. "There are images of Clark and Lois in there," he smiles. "I even showed them to [DC editor] Neil Pozner. I showed him the picture of the Angel and he said, 'It looks a lot like Superman.' I put him in an angle where the costume details that differentiate the two don't appear, and Neil thought it was fine. I really like the idea of Superman having an actual cameo in *Marvels*, like this is a perspective on comic book history, not just Marvel history. Jimmy Olsen appears in the second issue in background shots—I had to have lotsa photographers, and I figured Jimmy should be in there working!"

Since *Marvels* only goes up to 1972 in Marvel history, a sequel is being planned, However, Ross won't be involved. "We structured our series so that I could do Marvel in the time that I felt it was at its best and brightest, before I felt that there was a slide. Of course, I grew up in the '70s, and there's great stuff from that era—I just feel this ['60s] stuff involves purer concepts," says Ross, noting that the newer characters aren't as interesting to him. "I hate Wolverine! I'm just *sick* of that character, and I would never want to illustrate him—unless they let me make him look like Danny DeVito. The death of the Phoenix would be a great story to see from an outsider's perspective—of course, it took place on the Moon! I'm sure whatever Kurt does will be fun. I think he has done a bang-up job."

As a child, Ross says his favorite hero was Spider-Man, who does appear in the series, but the artist does have another "Marvel" he would love to work on for DC in the future. "I'll scream it to the world!" he exclaims. "Captain Marvel is tops, and I want to do Captain Marvel, and the whole Marvel Family, mythos and the Fawcett stuff."

Five years from now, Ross hopes to have worked out his desire to do superheroes. "I certainly hope I've advanced as an artist," he says. "I have some weird, eclectic concepts I may still like five years from now, and I may be doing those. I'll probably always be illustrating in the realm of the fantastic, because I have such a realistic style; why should I be illustrating stories about humdrum events that anybody could go out and film? Why shouldn't I be doing things that even people with $50 million budgets have trouble doing?"

Still, he says he would rather stay in comics than go to Hollywood and do storyboards, because he finds it more rewarding. "With comics, I am my own director. With movies, my editor would be the Hollywood studio, and my writer would be the screenwriter. But, I am the director. I imagine I'll still be fulfilled by what the comics medium is capable of five years from now. I always imagined I would be doing this—I think this medium has much to offer me, personally, so I'll be with it—then again, I could just get sick of it and go home!"

When he finishes his current series, Alex Ross is planning to paint some new marvels of his own. "I am glad to be out of the game, and go on to other things," he says. "By the end, I'm going to feel like I've *done* the Marvel Universe, or as much of it as I care to do. I've got future pitches in mind, and I have plenty of ideas for things outside the superhero genre, but at the moment, I'm happy working on *Marvels*."

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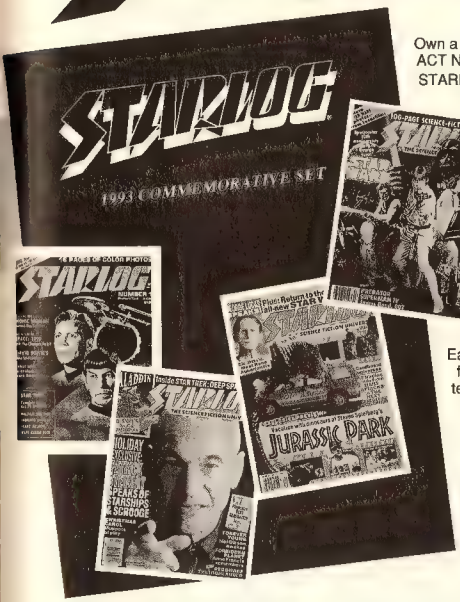

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Legacy

(continued from page 25)

that with Superman.

"When we started working out Protector and Legacy, we knew we *could* do that. We can take this international icon, kill him and see what happens. There's a wealth of good stories to be mined here. How does the world feel about this reliable champion being gone and leaving a group of bickering and untrained superbeings to take his place? It's a nerve-wracking situation.

"Our goal is to do exciting stories that are action-packed but not ultra-violent," he adds. "I look at some comics on the market today and see them saturated with huge guns and blood...it's pretty numbing after awhile. There's not very much originality or storytelling involved. It's harder to suggest violent action, and then make it meaningful, and it's harder to make dialogue seductive than to just show a woman in underwear. But we would rather take the challenge and do books that offer a little more."

And yes, there could conceivably be a time when Protector will be seen in action in a retrospective story.

"Someday, when we can't hold out against our greed any longer, we'll probably do a 'golden age' story showing Protector doing his thing," Schiller says with a laugh. "Don't look for it soon, though."

Before Schiller and his wife, Majestic's publisher Valarie Jones, became involved in this new venture, they both had long careers in comics. Jones wrote such series as *Robin Hood* (CS SPEC #5) and *The Retaliator* (CS #29) for Eclipse.

"I've been writing professionally for about 10 years, and I've had staff jobs at most of the companies out there," Schiller says. "I was editor-in-chief at NOW Comics. DC, Marvel, First—I've worked for most of them, on both the editorial and production sides. My most famous credit is 12 issues of *Rust* for NOW.

"The best thing is, everything I had done elsewhere has been training for what I'm doing now. I'm working harder and enjoying it more than anything I've ever done."

"Valarie was approached by a group of people interested in releasing quality, family-oriented entertainment, which is what we've been working toward," Schiller says. "Everyone elected her publisher, and she has been doing a fantastic job. Her first directive is that we won't write down to our readers; we do our stories and if the readers have questions, then rest assured—stay tuned and you'll get the answers!"

Years of writing comics gave Schiller plenty of names to contact when Majestic was being put together. "Valarie and I were in the right place at the right time, and knew lots of people who were willing to jump in with their own characters," he says. "For example, Dan Lawlis' work on *Legacy* is just terrific, and Stan Woch is doing dynamite inking. I have to say, I love the art, and working with these guys has been great. Paul Mounts, who does the painting work on *Legacy*, is one of the hearts of this whole company; his work and commitment have been amazing."

Fred Schiller admits that this summer's explosion of new universes makes launching one more a difficult effort, but feels that the quality of the product will keep the Majestic Universe afloat despite competition.

"Yeah, it's a rough market, especially this year," he says. "The good will hang on and the bad will go away. I don't know how many books being launched now are going to survive, but *Legacy* will be there. I tell you, I've worked on lots of books and I've never been this excited about anything before—we have a brand new place without 40 or 50 years' worth of continuity to worry about. We have to prove ourselves to the readers, and work to bring in new readers, but we're going to do it." CS

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THE PSY

Art: Tom Lee/Craig Stormon

Merciless funny-man? Light-hearted cyborg? Stupid human? Deathrow's all three & more.

By ERIC NIDEROST

All sorts of heroes inhabit the comics scene. There are classic heroes, pure in thought and noble in deed. And there are the anti-heroes, characters with some kind of tragic flaw in their makeup. They may be out for personal gain, bent on revenge, or simply out to scramble a few rules in pursuit of their goals.

But what about a "hero" who's a drugged-out, psychotic killer without a trace of mercy or even intelligence? A man who hires out to be a professional assassin, but often murders just because he has the "urge"? That's the premise of *Deathrow*, a three-issue mini-series from Blue Comet Press, an imprint of Heroic Publishing. Deathrow is the psycho in question, the murderous "glue" holding the plot together.

"Deathrow's nuts!" declares his creator, Craig Stormon. "He has mental problems, but he also has a sense of humor. I guess you could say he's a 'heavy' guy, but the book is light-hearted!"

Though not without futuristic elements, *Deathrow* is set in today's world and society. Hired by the Mob to eliminate a rival gang of drug dealers in contemporary Los Angeles, Deathrow (his street nickname) is well equipped for the task. In fact, this hit man is partly bionic.

"Deathrow is big," describes Stormon with obvious relish. "When he was 19, he was shot in the head and arm; his arm was almost blown off! But Dr. Hunzan, a genius from Switzerland, reconstructed his head and his arm, giving him superhuman strength." Now at 25, he's hell on wheels.

Readers will feel little sympathy for Deathrow's transformation, as one might sympathize with, say, RoboCop. Deathrow was a thoroughly despicable punk before the shooting; the bionic transformation only made a bad man worse. "His brain," Stormon elaborates, "became even more violent. There are times when he has 'attacks,' and must kill something.

"Sometimes he sees and hears things that aren't there. He doesn't think about the people he has killed, but sometimes he feels the ghosts of his innocent victims are after him."

Visually, Deathrow is a very strange character indeed. One whole side of his face is encased in metal, and a "mohawk" patch of hair divides his skull. What with the mohawk and the chains that decorate his clothes, here's one hit man who's quite literally cyberpunk. He has tanks strapped to his back, connected to a snorkel-like apparatus. The tanks "are nitrous oxide—laughing gas. He's always 'under the influence.'"

There are countless comics out there, competing for attention and profits. What does *Deathrow* have to offer that other vigilante-style books don't? "Well, I'm doing something with *Deathrow* that has *never* been done before," Stormon maintains. "The villains win. It's a whole new twist on the situation, where the good guys don't win.

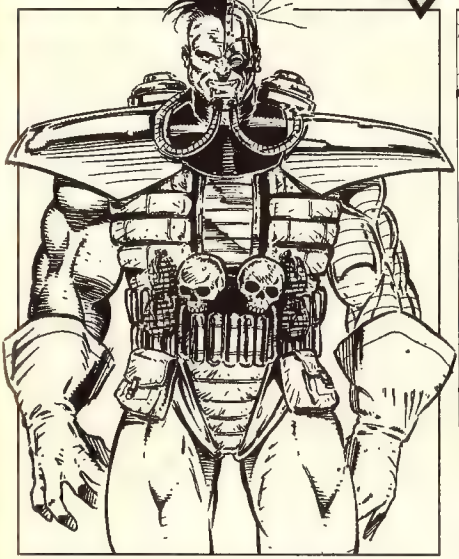
"Its appeal is that it veers away from the same old thing, where the big, handsome hero always comes out on top in the end. Deathrow is evil, without any redeeming qualities."

The mini-series does have a good guy, of sorts, in LA police detective Hank Blood. He's assigned the case of the massacred drug lords, which puts him on Deathrow's trail. Stormon describes Hank as a kind of "Dirty Harry."

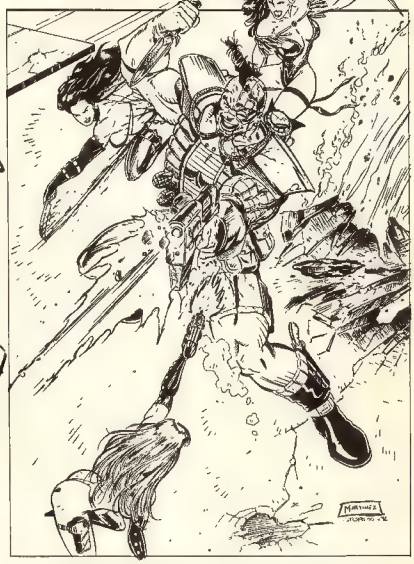
"Blood's chief introduces him to TV reporter Sue Martin. He's told he must take her along on the case, and he hates that. But Hank saves Sue's life, and they fall in love. Then, Deathrow kills Sue. From that point on, Blood has a motive for going after Deathrow—it's personal."

Deathrow also has a love interest—at least, he thinks so. Details the author, "Deathrow is secretly in love

CHO IN QUESTION



Wanted: A drugged-out, cyborg, psycho-killer with a funny bone. Call Deathrow's creator and booking agent, Craig Stormon.



"To compete [with other comics], we're doing more sex and violence," says Stormon.

Art: Henry Martinez/Craig Stormon

Design & Layout: Lea H. Leake

with Milady Doom. She thinks he's dirt; she's a lesbian and prefers women anyhow. She acts as if she might have sex with him to get him to do something extremely dangerous. But when the time comes to pay off, she'll have a headache, or be too busy!"

Doom (very subtle name) injects an element of the occult into the mini-series. It seems she's a "mystical sorceress, and she works for a demon who's trying to come up from the netherworld. If successful, he'll ultimately take over the world!"

Deathrow has more than just Detective Blood and Milady Doom to contend with. The rival drug gang, the Crypt Men, are really suffering losses due to Deathrow's actions. They decide to fight fire with fire—or more accurately, cyborg with cyborg. Dr. Hunzan creates another cyborg maniac for them, X-187. In police jargon, "187" is murder, so his name is altogether appropriate.

X-187 looks like a cross between the Predator and He-Man's arch-foe, Skeletor. His main mission is to destroy Deathrow, and the stage is set for a battle royal.

"His head comes from a marine who was disobeying orders," Stormon relates. "But at issue #1's end, Deathrow and X-187 really go at it. They don't kill each other, but they do manage to wreck Los Angeles."

Stormon describes X-187 as "a nice guy"—nice, that is, for a psycho killer machine. If *Deathrow* takes off, expect further blood-drenched adventures. X-187 may also star in his own title.

The *Deathrow* mini-series is a collaborative effort, with not one but *three* artists taking on the drawing chores. The pencillers are Tom Lee, Tony Santini and Bryan Kwong. Stormon was looking for a particular style.

Says Stormon, "We're very much in the Image Comics style, also called the 'California' or 'Southern California' style. Although Tom Lee pencils in the style of Joe Quesada, they all have certain recognizable styles and add their own distinctive personalities to their work."

But why have three artists at work? Wouldn't it be simpler to have *one* unified vision, without any visual changes, however small? "As an artist myself, I like giving them that freedom to interpret the character," Stormon announces. "In regard to having three artists, there are production reasons. It enables us to get the books done faster. Also, I wanted to give all these guys a shot—they're very good artists. A reader might like one, and not another, but he's going to like something."

Stormon has been an artist for most of his life. He explains that in the '60s, "I was a surfer. But I've always done comics and artwork. I actually started doing underground comics in 1969, though I did other things too, like silkscreening T-shirts. But I really went into comics in 1983. I did an exercise book, which netted me $3,000. Then, I drew my own comic, and created my own characters.

"I didn't know anything then. Using my own money, I printed 10,000 copies. They sold out in two weeks, and I

printed more. Eventually, I printed 18,000 copies, and they sold out."

His present effort is a partnership with Heroic Publishing. "About a year ago," Stormon remembers, "I got together with Dennis Mallonee, owner and publisher of Heroic. They do six or eight titles a month, including *League of Champions* and *Tigress*. I started out doing publicity and promotion for Heroic, and also inking. I'm the inker of *Tigress*, for instance. Heroic pays for my printing, and Blue Comet solicits in their catalog."

Heroic Publishing is an independent, as is its junior partner, Blue Comet. Although the marketplace is far too crowded, and some companies will be falling by the wayside, Stormon is confident that there's a place for his comics.

"We can't really compete with the big companies yet," Stormon confides. "We're doing black-and-white comics, for example, because we can't afford color. To compete, one thing we're doing is *more* sex and violence. Up to this point, most of our books have been PG, but now we're in a new market. I would say Deathrow is R-rated, for mostly mature audiences.

"The violence is heavy, but you see a lot of that on TV. As for the sex, we might show two characters in bed, but we'll probably have sheets covering the important areas."

Art: Dell Barras

All Art: Courtesy Craig Stormon

It's a clash of the cyborgs when Deathrow (left) goes head to head with X-187.

Art: Bryan Kwong

All Characters & Art: Copyright 1993 Blue Comet Press

There's nothing like a few thousand shards of glass and a cyborg to liven up a party.

Stormon freely admits he's building a comic book universe, one inhabited by all Blue Comet characters including the "iron cupcakes"—Windraven, Shandazar and Wendy Blazer, described by their inventor as "very sexy and formidable." Guest shots and crossovers may lie in the future.

With *Deathrow* in service, Stormon is already developing a muscleman from another planet, Zoran. He hails from the planet Rynald, a world still in a prehistoric era. "Rynald is on a lower level of evolution," Stormon says. "In fact, Zoran has dinosaurs around him. His girl friend is the main wizardess of the entire planet. She uses Rynaldian soul stones and magic rites to keep the demons in check. They're always trying to kidnap or kill her, and Zoran's always saving her!"

He also rides a flying reptile. "The pterodactyl is intelligent. He's Zoran's best buddy, and they communicate telepathically."

Craig Stormon predicts a promising future for both Heroic Publishing and his own Blue Comet Press. "Five years from now," he announces, "we'll be among the top 10 companies in comics. Already, some of our books are selling as many as 10,000 copies. We're growing steadily."

COMICS Scene

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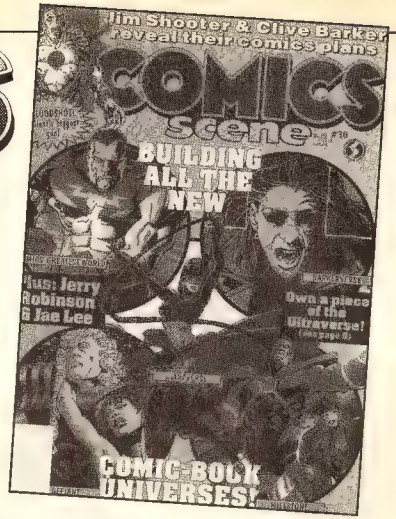
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Riot Gear

(continued from page 49)

that at the story's expense."

Besides the obvious advantages, writing all five monthly Triumphant titles has its downside. "The biggest disadvantage may be time," Riley laughs. "I wish I had weeks to spend on any given book, as opposed to the time frame I have to work in.

"The advantage of being able to see the entire universe unfold from one pair of eyes greatly outweighs it, though. Everything is coherent and consistent throughout the universe. Except for *Doctor Chaos*, you're going to get the same universe in every book. The dialogue and plots stand independently, but when you put them all together and see the events really happen behind the scenes, you'll start to get a really big picture. By writing all the books, I can keep that picture tight and coherent. To me, that has been a great strength of the books up to this point. What we'll want to do five months from now, I'm not sure, but I think I'll still be involved in generating plotlines for most, if not all, of the books as we add the next three titles over the next year. At this point, Eric [Shefferman, Triumphant publisher] and I work very well together, and going over all of the scripts is helping him out, in terms of maintaining tight continuity and integrity."

Triumphant plans to reward its readers in various ways. "You're not going to see gold foil poly-bagged stuff," Riley vows. "The 12 covers for the *Triumphant Unleashed* crossover form one large image, but there's no increase in cover price—it's just an added bonus. The first appearance of Defiant Comics' *War Dancer* is going to take place in one of the Triumphant books during the crossover. Not only will all the covers interlock, but the center panels of all 12 books will form one large poster of Doctor Chaos meeting War Dancer—a 'non-crossover crossover.' "

One of Triumphant's most obvious innovations are individually numbered comics, but Riley says it's only the beginning. "The serial numbering is *not* just a gimmick. We have a whole bunch of things planned for it that will make collecting these books *fun*. You'll never know if the number you have entitles you to something special."

Admitting that they are an unknown quantity in today's comic marketplace, John Riley says they're determined to live up to their company's name.

"No one knows about Triumphant right now, but I think people are really going to enjoy the things that we'll deliver," he says. "That's what I'm hoping for—I want people to enjoy the books and read a good story!"

Bone

(continued from page 15)

"I've found that, when you're writing something silly—like a cow race, for instance—you have to take it seriously, and the characters do, too. Somehow, that makes it more funny. No matter how stupid what they're doing is, my characters *have* to take what they're doing seriously.

"When I'm writing this series, I picture it in my head, just like it's a movie. So, say I'm writing this Cow Race. I know I need to start the race, so I'll picture the starting line. All these cows lined up at the starting line. Then, 'Ready. Set. Go!' I see this line of cows, Gran'ma Ben coming toward the camera, *rumble rumble rumble*. I actually see it move.

"Then, I realize I have to move Gran'ma Ben through this crowd of cows, as she notices Smiley Bone dressed in a cow costume. [Phoney Bone has had his cousin dress as a cow and has entered him in the race as "the mystery cow," all part of Phoney's plot to make a killing betting on the cow race.] So, I back things up and start things over—the starting line, ready set go!, *rumble rumble rumble*. Then, I picture Gran'ma Ben moving through the crowd, *rumble rumble rumble*, trying to get a line on this mystery cow. Many times, the jokes will work out as I'm picturing things in my head. I think, 'Yeah, I could make him fall right there, that would be funny.' That's the most fun, when I'm actually writing the story."

Smith says, "Now that the Cow Race and those hijinks are out of the way, I'll be getting back to my storyline, and moving on to what is, in a sense, my next little story. The Cow Race leaves Phoney Bone wiped out, and he becomes indentured to Gran'ma Ben. That will serve to keep the Bone cousins in the valley, instead of heading back to Boneville, which is where they thought they were going [after the Cow Race]. They'll have to rebuild Gran'ma Ben's cabin [destroyed in *Bone* #5 when the rat creatures attacked Gran'ma Ben, Fone Bone and Thorn] and that will serve as the arc to the cousins' next adventure. As they're working on the cabin, I'll be able to have some interplay between the characters, have them get into some discussions, that sort of thing.

"The economy of the valley is based on dairy and poultry products. I may have Phoney Bone, for instance, with two chickens, trying to convince them to lay more eggs. I can picture him," says Jeff Smith, planning for the future, "setting these two chickens down to supper at a table—wining and dining them as he 'hatches' his next get-rich scheme."

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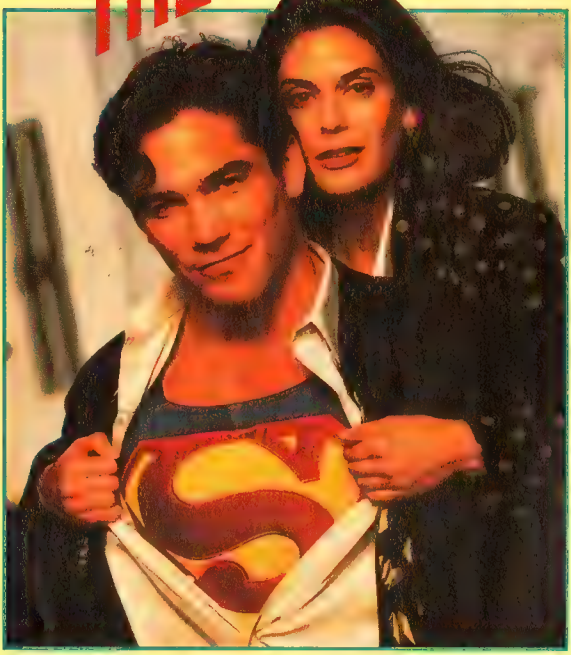

Faster than a speeding bullet, Superman returns from the dead to star in his very own TV show. Lois, though, gets top billing.

Look! On the air! It's Superman! Plus Lois & Clark & Lex & Perry & Jimmy & Cat!

By MAUREEN McTIGUE

Timing is everything. For most of this past year, comic-book fandom has been haunted by the ghost of Superman and his four replacements. There was also the nagging knowledge that a TV show based on the dead character would be airing this fall. This fact brought up the eternal question, "How are they gonna do that?" Which, of course, was followed by, "This just proves that Superman can't be dead. Duh."

Lo and behold, about two weeks before *Lois & Clark: The New Adventures of Superman* began airing, the Big Red S came back. The real one. Just like everyone expected. And now he's on the air in the company of the usual supporting characters.

There's a different twist to the show. Instead of showcasing superheroic highlights, co-executive producer and series creator Deborah Joy LeVine's version plays on the relationship between Clark Kent/Superman (Dean Cain) and Lois Lane (Teri Hatcher) in addition to Lex Luthor (John Shea), Perry White (Lane Smith), Cat Grant (Tracy Scoggins) and Jimmy Olsen (Michael Landis). This incarnation of the fictional world of Metropolis is brought to life in Burbank.

A quick run through the Warner Bros. backlot brings the sight of a barn-like building where scenes from *Demolition Man* had shot in the not-so-distant past. Another bustling set fills the area. Interior: Club scene. Metro Club, that is. Metro as in Metropolis.

Extraneous people are hustled out of the "bar" as the calls for "Quiet" followed by "Rolling" are sounded. Production on scenes 21-26, 29-35 are under way. Interior: Metro Club-Back Room, Toni (Jessica Tuck) takes over gang; Interior: Metro Club-Front Door, Clark and Lois talk, Lois sings, Luthor enters; Interior: Metro Club-Hall/Supply Closet, Lois listens in on meeting; Interior: Metro Club-Hall/Supply Closet, Toni catches Lois/Clark in closet, Clark turns Lois in as spy. All this leads up to—Exterior: Alley, Clark drops Lois in dumpster.

To shoot all of this, an entire day is used and only eight and one-eighth script pages are filmed for what might amount to mere minutes in "I've Got a Crush On You," directed by *M*A*S*H*'s Gene Reynolds. The episode entails Lois' going undercover in a Metropolis gang to get the story. Yep, that's our Lois.

On Stage 14 of the Warner Bros. lot stands the *Daily Planet* newsroom. The design mixes time periods with 1940s-style desks and more modern computer terminals. Being described as "*Moonlighting* meets *Superman*," *Lois & Clark* also has *Lou Grant* overtones. The newspaper aspect will be a major focus as the cast will "always be going after the story." Most of the episodes will center around the Pit, where most of the newspaper action will take place. Much like *Lou Grant*. Get used to it.

The press office melts into the lunch room; a bit past the real estate desk and up a small flight of stairs is the *Planet*'s lobby. Walls bear past *Daily Planet* covers from World War II to JFK's assassination.

Clark Kent's desk is perpendicular to Jimmy Olsen's. Across the way, Lois Lane and Cat Grant sit one behind the other with only a wobbly TV wall be-

Lois & Clark Photos: Jeffry Fitzgerald/Copyright 1993 Capital Cities/ABC, Inc

Dean Cain stars as Clark Kent (and sometimes even Superman).

Design & Layout: Len H. Leake Superman Characters: Trademark & Copyright 1993 DC Comics Inc.

Lois (Teri Hatcher) is always after the big story, and no story is bigger than Superman.

tween them. Copies of the *Smallville Press* lie on just almost everyone's desk. Certificates of various recognitions are clearly altered to bear the name *Daily Planet*—but only upon close observance.

A quick rifle through Clark Kent's desk finds photocopied storyboards of a guy in a cape acting heroic. Wonder who that could be.

As opposed to the usual blue screen, a green screen is employed in *Lois & Clark*—for the simple reason that if they used a blue one, all that would be seen of Superman would be boots, a cape and the big red "S". Oh yeah, and his shorts. The high flying wires hang off to the side.

Clark's apartment is full of what looks like second-hand furniture with rather eclectic tastes—definitely a bachelor starting out. One can picture Clark bringing Lois to his place and her reacting with a sarcastic "Nice place."

Right next to Clark's Metropolis digs is the Kents' Smallville homestead. Porcelain chickens and flowered curtains adorn the farmhouse. Laying among some dry goods is part of the script to episode three, "I'm Looking Through You." A quick check reveals a scene that could have been lifted straight out of the comics. A discussion of the selling of Superman has Clark in emotional turmoil while Ma and Pa Kent try to ease his worried mind (the money is going to help poor unfortunates, after all). Though he's a big city boy now, the farm lad in Clark comes out when he tells Ma and Pa, "Even Lois has a pair of Superman pajamas." "You've seen Lois in her pajamas?" is the parental retort. And a flustered Clark states, "Well, yes, er no, I mean, when her robe fell open."

Dean Cain's real-life athletic background is displayed. Photos of a younger Cain in Little League and junior football rest on the mantle. The actor was a record-setting Princeton University athlete as well as a member of the Buffalo Bills.

Down the road from the Kents, in another soundstage, is Lois Lane's place. Though a similar Far Eastern motif appears in her apartment, Lois' isn't as tacky as Clark's.

At the time of the visit, the Lois set is "hot," meaning that they're still shooting on it (though, no one is there at the time) and *nothing* can be touched. Continuity is in the balance.

Lois' neighbor on this soundstage is Lex Luthor. A city skyline backdrop hangs across from Luthor's balcony. Luthor likes extravagance: Ancient Babylonian/Egyptian/Aztec decor runs through his study and hallways. He's definitely a man with big tastes. His gun wall stands empty at this time, though.

Warner Bros. is putting a great deal into this production, except for Superman. The most popular alter-ego in American fiction *will* appear, but only for about 20 percent of each episode. The comics people behind Superman *are* behind the show, saying that it holds true to what they have created. In fact, some of them even get to make an appearance in crowd sequences in "I'm Looking Through You" and its follow-up episode. The show faces fierce competition, but the studio believes that their target audience of 18-35-year-old women will enjoy the action/comedy/romance of *Lois & Clark* on Sunday nights.

After a set tour devoid of life, Dean Cain makes a quick appearance—as his Bronco pulls up outside the stage door. Yesterday's shooting of "I've Got a Crush on You" ran overtime and Cain is only getting to the set at 11:30 a.m. ("I'm running a little late this morning," he laughs.) He's on his way to the gym. Yeah, even Superman has to work out.

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COMICS screen

COMICS REPORTER

All of these upcoming projects are live-action unless specified. Those boxed are new or updated since last listing. Not **everything listed will ultimately ever be made.** S: script; D: director; P: producer; EP: executive producer; C: creator; AN: animated; LA: live-action; Syn: syndicated; HB: Hanna-Barbera; Nel: Nelvana; WD: Disney; WB: Warner Bros.; PP: Paramount; U: Universal; Col: Columbia; Am: Amblin; DH: Dark Horse; L: Largo. **Attn. all pros:** Info to be added to this list is cheerfully invited. Send to COMICS SCENE, 475 Park Ave. South, 8th Flr., NY, NY 10016. (Info as of 9/3/93)

Values Photo: Melinda Sue Gordon/Copyright 1993 Paramount Pictures

Morticia (Anjelica Huston) and Gomez (Raul Julia) teach movie-goers new lessons in *The Addams Family Values*. The sequel to the hit film based on Charles Addams' classic cartoons premieres this month.

Addams Family. Sequel. PP. Fall. AN series. ABC. HB.

The Airtight Garage. AN.

❑ **Alfred E. Neuman.** Film. P: Steven Haft, QDE.

Alias. Film. U. S: David S. Goyer. P: P. Lenkov, S. Daniel.

ALIENS vs. Predator. Film. DH/Fox.

Annie. Film. Rastar.

Archie. LA Film. DIC.

Barbarella. LA film. Nel.

❑ **Batman.** AN film. X-mas. LA sequel. D: Joel Schumacher. S: Lee & Janet Batchler.

Betty Boop. AN film. S: Jerry Rees. EP: R. Fleischer, R. Zanuck. MGM.

Black Panther. Film. W/Wesley Snipes. Sony.

Blade. Film.

Blankman. Film. C: Damon Wayans, Eric Gold. D: Mike Binder. Sony.

Blondie. Film. WB.

Broom Hilda. Film. P: Ernest Chambers.

Busby Bobcat. AN TV special. Calico. Factory.

Cadillacs & Dinosaurs. AN series. Nel. CBS.

❑ **Casper.** Film. Am/U. D: Alex Proyas. S: Sherri Stoner, Deanna Oliver.

❑ **Catwoman.** Film. WB. W/ Michelle Pfeiffer. S: Dan Waters.

❑ **Charlie Chan.** D: Michael Mann.

Concrete. Film. DH. S: Larry Wilson, Paul Chadwick.

The Crow. Film.

❑ **Crying Freeman.** Film. D: Christophe Gans. P: Brian Yuzna

Crusader Rabbit. AN TV.

Deadworld. Film. S: Mark Pavia (D), Jack O'Donnell (P).

Dinosaurs for Hire. AN.

Dr. Strange. Film. S/D: Wes Craven. Savoy Ent.

Doom's IV. Film. P/S: Rob Liefeld. Am.

❑ **Double Dragon.** AN. DIC. P/D: Chuck Patton. Syn. 13 episodes. Premieres fall.

❑ **Duckman.** AN series. USA.

Dudley Do-Right. Film. U.

Elektra Assassin. Film.

Faust. Film. D: Stuart Gordon. S: David Quinn.

Flaming Carrot. Film.

The Flintstones. Film. Fred: John Goodman. Barney: Rick Moranis. U/Am. D: Brian Levant. Summer '94. AN TV special. ABC. Fall.

❑ **Ghost Rider.** Film.

The Green Falcon. TV. Am.

The Green Hornet. Film. S: Chuck Pfarrer. U.

Incredible Hulk. Film. U.

❑ **Inspector Gadget.** LA film. S: J. Loeb III, M. Weisman. AN special. NBC. X-Mas. U.

❑ **Judge Dredd.** Film. Sylvester Stallone. S: Bill Wisher. D: Danny Cannon.

Kull. Film. U. S: C. Pogue.

❑ **The Land Before Time.** AN sequels. Direct to video.

The Lion King. AN film. WD. Nov. '94.

Lone Wolf & Cub. Film. D: John Bruno. S: Bill Wisher.

Mai the Psychic Girl. Film.

Mantis. Fox TV. U. EP: Sam Raimi, Sam Hamm. W/ Carl Lumbly. For mid-season.

❑ **The Mask.** Film. New Line. S/D: Chuck Russell. W/ Jim Carrey, Richard Jeni. Shooting.

The Men in Black. Film. Col. P: W. Parkes, L. McDonald.

Mr. Magoo. Film. Am/WB.

❑ **Model by Day.** TV movie. Fox. Airs October-November.

❑ **Pagemaster.** AN/LA film. D: Joe Johnston. Fox/HB. X-Mas 1994.

Peanuts. LA film. P/S: John Hughes. WB.

The Phantom. Film. PP.

Plastic Man. Film. WB/Am. S: L. Wilson. D: Bryan Spicer.

Pocahontas. AN film. WD.

❑ **Prince Valiant.** AN series. Family Chan. LA film. S: M. Beckner, Roger Kumble, Marlene King. N. Constantin.

❑ **The Pulse.** Film. C: Todd McFarlane. QDE.

Red Sonja. TV. Lancit.

Reid Fleming. Film. WB.

❑ **Richie Rich.** Film. P: J. Silver, J. Davis. D: John Avildsen. S: Jim Jennewein, Tom Parker.

The Saint. Film. P: Robert Evans. PP.

Sandman. Film.

Sgt. Rock. Film. P: Joel Silver. D: Renny Harlin. S: John Milius. WB.

❑ **The Shadow.** Film. S: David Koepp. P: Martin Bregman. D: Russell Mulcahy. W/Alec Baldwin, Penelope Ann Miller. Now shooting.

Sheena. TV series. P: Paul Aratow. Col.

❑ **Sin City.** S: Frank Miller.

Speed Racer. AN TV series. Film. D: Patrick Read Johnson. S: J.F. Lawton. WB.

❑ **The She-Hulk.** TV project.

Spider-Man. AN TV mini-series. Fox. Daily TV series later. Film. S: Jim Cameron (D), Neil Ruttenberg. Summer '95.

❑ **Spy vs. Spy.** Film. P: Steven Tisch, QDE.

Starwatcher. AN film. PP.

❑ **Stealth Force.** Film. Kandoo.

Superman. TV series. ABC.

❑ **Swat Kats.** AN. HB. TBS. Just debuted.

Tales from the Crypt. HBO.

Tales from the Crypt-Keeper. AN TV series. Nel. ABC.

Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles. AN series. CBS, Syn.

Terry & the Pirates. TV.

The Tick. AN TV mini-series. Fox. Sunbow.

❑ **Time Cop.** Film. D: Peter Hyams. S: Mark Verheiden. DH/L. U. W/ Jean-Claude Van Damme.

Trouble with Girls. Film. Fox. S: W. Jacobs, G. Jones.

We're Back. AN film. Am/U. November '93.

Wolff & Byrd. TV. Lorimar. P: Joel Simon, Bill Todman Jr. EP/D: Joe Dante. Fox.

Wonder Woman. AN TV.

X-Men. LA film. Fox.

Zen. Film. AN series.

Zorro. Film. S: J. Randal Johnson, Joel Gross. D: Mikael Salomon. TriStar. AN TV series. Imagination F. Calico. Broadway musical.

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